

MICHAEL INNES

An Inspector Appleby Mystery

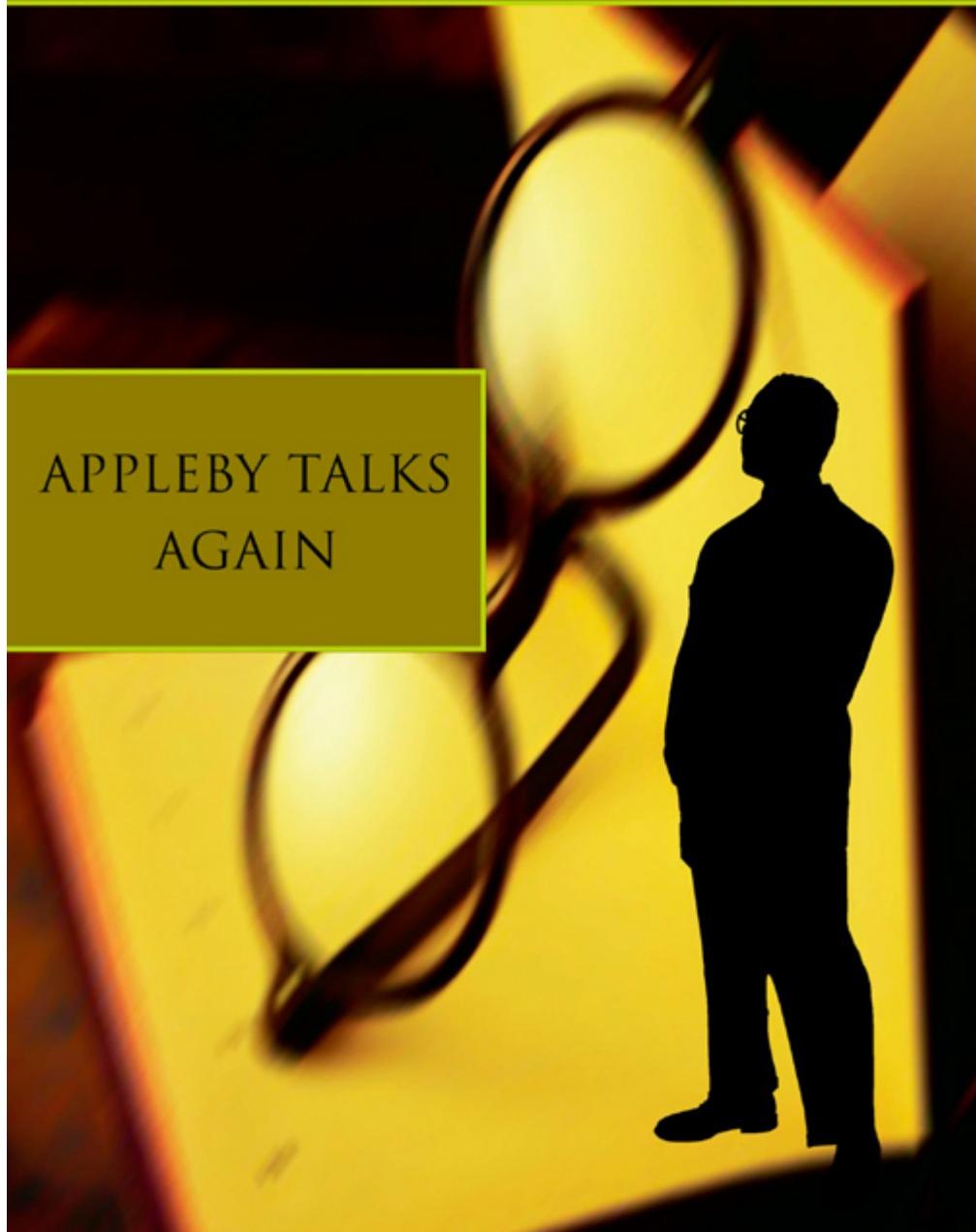
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AGAIN



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Appleby Talks Again

First published in 1956

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House of Stratus 1956-2010

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This edition published in 2010 by House of Stratus, an imprint of
Stratus Books Ltd., Lisandra House, Fore Street,
Looe,
Cornwall, PL13 1AD, UK.

Typeset by House of Stratus.

A catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library and the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 0755120825 EAN: 9780755120826

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About the Author



Michael Innes is the pseudonym of John Innes Mackintosh Stewart, who was born in Edinburgh in 1906. His father was Director of Education and as was fitting the young Stewart attended Edinburgh Academy before going up to Oriel, Oxford where he obtained a first class degree in English.

After a short interlude travelling with AJP Taylor in Austria, he embarked on an edition of *Florio's* translation of *Montaigne's Essays* and also took up a post teaching English at Leeds University.

By 1935 he was married, Professor of English at the University of Adelaide in Australia, and had completed his first detective novel, *Death at the President's Lodging*. This was an immediate success and part of a long running series centred on his character Inspector Appleby. A second novel, *Hamlet Revenge*, soon followed and overall he managed over fifty under the Innes banner during his career.

After returning to the UK in 1946 he took up a post with Queen's University, Belfast before

finally settling as Tutor in English at Christ Church, Oxford. His writing continued and he published a series of novels under his own name, along with short stories and some major academic contributions, including a major section on modern writers for the *Oxford History of English Literature*.

Whilst not wanting to leave his beloved Oxford permanently, he managed to fit in to his busy schedule a visiting Professorship at the University of Washington and was also honoured by other Universities in the UK.

His wife Margaret, whom he had met and married whilst at Leeds in 1932, had practised medicine in Australia and later in Oxford, died in 1979. They had five children, one of whom (Angus) is also a writer. Stewart himself died in November 1994 in a nursing home in Surrey.

A MATTER OF GOBLINS

"You're sure it's uninhabited?" Sir John Appleby peered ahead rather apprehensively as the car moved slowly over the uneven track. "There isn't a resident squire? The Pooles are one of those families that have entirely evaporated from the English scene?"

"How inquiring you turn when we have a small job of trespass on hand." Lady Appleby pressed firmly on the accelerator. "I don't know why even an eminent policeman need be so law-abiding. As for the Pooles, I believe there are plenty of them."

"But not here? Look out for that cow."

"Not here. I don't know that Water Poole ought to be called uninhabited. That, to my mind, suggests ruins and generations of emptiness. But I understand that it's certainly unoccupied and beginning to tumble to pieces. You'll see for yourself."

"You mean we're to go *in*?"

"Of course. That's always the real fun. There'll be a window."

Appleby groaned. "Judith my dear, I foresee it all. Indeed, it has happened again and again. We break in. We cover ourselves with dust and cobweb. We twist our ankles in rotting floorboards. And then the man comes."

"Nonsense."

"We hear him approaching with a sinister limp. He is simply some cottager told off to keep an eye on the place. But we are petrified. You are even more terror-struck than I am. Your bravado deserts you. Out of compassion for your pitiable condition, I consent to our hiding in a cupboard. And there the man finds us."

"I never heard such rot. Such a thing has never happened to us. Or only once."

"I rattle my small change loudly in my pocket and assume an air of jaunty patronage. The good old man—"

"The what?"

"That's what he is. The good old man fails to hear the half-crowns. He is unaware of my manner, which I myself distinguish with piercing clarity as indistinguishable from that of numerous petty criminals of my acquaintance. But he does recognise both your accent and your clothes as virtually identical with those of the late squire's dear old mother—"

"I think you're abominable."

"And so – in a humiliating sort of way – all is well, and we are shown round and offered a lot of inaccurate antiquarian information. As we leave, I give the good old man five shillings. He touches his hat respectfully – to you."

"Then that's all right." Judith Appleby slowed down to avoid another cow. "It looks to me as if there has been a car along here already today."

"I'd say there have been several." Appleby picked up a map. "And that's odd, for this certainly leads to the manor house and no further. And it's curious, by the way, that a place

of some apparent consequence should never have run to a better approach."

"It may have been less primitive at one time. And, of course, they always had the river." Judith pointed to a line of poplars in the middle distance. "It's quite navigable from here to where it joins the Thames, and probably some of their heavy stuff used to come and go by water. But one of the fascinating things about Water Poole, I gather, is just its remarkable isolation. There's really nothing for miles... And there it is."

They had swung round a clump of beech trees still in their freshest green, and now the venerable Elizabethan house was directly in front of them. Involuntarily, they both exclaimed in dismay. Water Poole was a larger place than they had expected, and much more nearly ruinous. Approaching from this aspect, one might have supposed some labour of demolition to be in progress – had one not become aware at the same time of absolute solitude and silence.

The ground-plan of the building appeared to be the familiar Tudor H. And one of the end pavilions – it must in fact have constituted a stack of handsome rooms – had come down in a mass of rubble which spread far across the derelict open courtyard before them. Already the tumbled stone and plaster was in part overgrown with hemlock and thistle. And high up, incongruously reminiscent of bomb damage in a London square, they could see a single slice of an augustly panelled apartment, with swallows nesting under the narrow strip of ceiling that remained to it. Elsewhere the long grey façade, which for centuries had faced this empty landscape with a mellow confidence, was flaked and cracked and crumbling round gaping windows and below a

broken balustrade. It had been a noble dwelling – and now its whole appearance was so forlorn and disgraced that Appleby had the feeling of having committed an unseemly intrusion. Even the hum of the car seemed an impertinence. The same impression must have come to Judith, for she slipped out of gear and switched off the engine. They glided forward silently into the embracing silence of the place. It was like a physical medium receiving them and covering them, as if they had been swimmers plunging without a ripple into a deep still lake.

"Somebody told me it was occupied during the war – shared by two families." Unconsciously Judith had lowered her voice, as one might do in the presence of some meditating sage. "But it looks far too ruinous for that."

"There's plenty of it, and matters mayn't be so bad on the other side."

"But they've plainly let it go. Nobody is hoping ever to bring it to life again." Judith stopped the car and they got out. "It's enormous. And that's made it too stiff a commitment for whatever Pooles remain."

Appleby nodded. "Certainly it's on the large side. Indeed, it's more like one of the showplaces put up by Elizabeth's great courtiers than a run-of-the-mill manor house. Who are these Pooles?"

"An old family, I believe, taking their name from this part of the shire, and giving it to the house when they built it. They met disaster in the Civil War; a father and two sons all killed at Naseby. Now, I imagine, they are impoverished, and quite insignificant as well. Shall we go ahead?" Judith, as she asked this question, was already in vigorous forward motion.

"There will be no harm in walking round the gardens." Appleby put forward this proposition not very hopefully. "But undoubtedly it lays us open to misconception."

"We might be taken for thieves?" Judith was amused. "I don't see much that we could make away with."

"There's probably thousands of pounds' worth of lead on the roof." Appleby stopped suddenly. "I wonder if somebody *has* been after that? The ground suggests a good deal of recent coming and going. Or perhaps people help themselves to loads of that rubble. It could be useful in all sorts of ways. We'll go round the house and down to the river."

For some seconds they walked on without speaking. Even in the clear light and gentle warmth of this early morning in June there was something insistently depressing about Water Poole in its last long agony. They climbed by insecure and treacherous steps to a mouldering terrace fast disappearing under a lush growth of summer weeds. They passed between the side of the house and a large formal garden which was now mere wilderness. And presently they came to the river frontage. "Why," Judith exclaimed, "it *is* better - ever so much better. It's almost cheerful."

"I don't know that I'd go as far as that. But at least they've cut the grass. Odd, perhaps - but meritorious."

On this side too the house was elevated behind a terrace, and between the terrace and the river lay a broad expanse of turf. This was not in good condition, but it had certainly been recently mown with some care. Judith looked at it in

perplexity. "I suppose it's a gallant attempt to make a decent show. But who's to see it? No one would bring a sail up here, and its decidedly remote for canoes or punts... The fabric's better, too."

Appleby turned. The house as viewed from this angle was plainly in disastrous disrepair, but it bore no suggestion of falling to pieces. The terrace here was in tolerable order, the windows were either glazed or decently shuttered, and under a massive portico a stout oak door appeared firmly shut. Rather to his wife's surprise, Appleby led the way across the grass and climbed a broad flight of steps that rose to the house between battered statues. "Weeded," he said. "And they don't tilt disconcertingly when you tread on them." He stooped. "Patched up, after a fashion." He reached the terrace, walked to the oak door and tried it. "Locked." And this time, to Judith's positive astonishment, he gave it an impatient rattle. "Shades of Dr Johnson's father."

"Dr Johnson's father, John?"

"Don't you remember? Every night old Michael Johnson went out and locked with great care the front door of a building which no longer had any back to it. Young Sam was afraid he was going off his head. Well, Water Poole has a back rather like that. So if we *do* want to go inside there's no particular difficulty. We just go round to the other side again."

"Then here goes – and I believe you're quite as curious as I am."

"It's the place that's curious – not me." For a moment Appleby turned to glance again at the river. It was no more than a stream, but he

judged it to hold promise of excellent trout. "And as for that lawn—" He broke off, and they returned to the back of the house in silence.

On this side the terrace half-obsured a basement floor of cellars and offices, and into these they walked without hindrance. For a time they wandered among flagged chambers and passages, either vaulted or with plaster ceilings most of which now lay on the floors. Here and there were vast fireplaces, cumbersome stone troughs, gloomy larders and pantries with massive slate shelves on a scale suggesting a morgue. Nothing movable was to be seen — except in one obscure recess a heap of brushwood disposed into a rough bed, with signs of a small fire nearby, as if a tramp of the more pronouncedly melancholic sort had recently chosen this congenial spot for temporary residence. It was clear that in modern times the house when occupied must have achieved more practicable domestic arrangements on the next floor. And to this the Applebys presently climbed. So far, it had all been most depressing, and Judith's whole exploration appeared to hold every promise of ending in mere dismalness. Appleby endeavoured to enliven the proceedings by affecting to hear the threatening approach of the man. His wife however was not amused.

But upstairs it was different. The great hall was a stately place, with high mullioned windows looking towards the river, a fine linen-fold panelling which must have been older than the house itself, and an elaborately ribbed plaster vaulting with pendants. These last had mostly broken off, and the effect was oddly like one of those caves or grottos in which eighteenth-century gentlemen amused themselves by

shooting down the stalactites. But to an eye failing to travel so high as this the impression was less of decay than of suspended animation. Here was the very heart of the house, and it still faintly beat. It seemed only to be awaiting some prompting occasion to pulse more strongly, until the place felt the quickening flood in all its enchanted limbs, and stirred and breathed again.

Judith paced the length of the hall from screen to dais, and there stood quite still, as if she were listening. When she came back her expression had changed. "It's queer," she said. "There's something."

"Something?"

"Don't you feel it?" She smiled at him, faintly puzzled. "But of course you don't. It's not your line."

"If you mean ghosts and what not, I didn't know it was your line either."

"Not quite ghosts. Unless – yes – a throng of ghosts. I have a feeling of time shutting up, telescoping. Our time and theirs. So that they were here – and have all gone away – only today or yesterday."

Appleby was examining on the great carved screen a fine series of panels exhibiting the motive of an arch in perspective. "My dear girl, who are 'they'?"

"I don't know." She laughed at her own absurdity. "Gentlemen adventurers bound for the Spanish Main. Cavaliers riding away to join Prince Rupert or the King. If we had been just a little earlier we might have seen them. They forded the river, I think, and rode away at dawn."

"You ought to have gone in for historical novels, not for sculpture. But – talking of that – look at the chimney-piece. It's rather good, in a florid way."

They studied it for some minutes: an affair of Hermes-figures, dolphins and cupids, surmounted by an ornate heraldic carving. "It's odd about names," Judith said. "They don't go in for a pool, but a pole." She pointed to this element in the elaborate coat of arms that crowned the structure. "But what's that piece of carving lower down? I'd say it's been added later."

"It's another pole – chopped in two by a sword. What's called an emblem, rather than heraldry proper. And there's a motto. No – it's simply a date. Can you see?"

"Yes." There was clear sunlight in the hall, and Judith had no difficulty. What she read was:

ye 14 June

1645

Appleby thought for a moment. "Naseby, in fact. The Pooles were in no doubt about that battle's being the end of them."

"And this is the tenth."

"The tenth?" He was at a loss.

"Of June. Four days to the anniversary. No wonder—" She broke off. "John, there's somebody coming. There really is, this time."

Appleby listened. There could be no doubt about the advancing footsteps. "Then we go through with it, as usual. Unless, of course, it's

not the man, but a ghost. One of Prince Rupert's friends, say, who forgot some weapon – or some piece of finery – and has come back for it."

"What nonsense we talk. But there is something queer."

"I rather agree."

They looked at each other for a moment in whimsical alarm, before turning expectantly to the far end of the hall, from which the sound came. In a dark doorway beyond the dais they glimpsed what for an instant might have been identified as a gleam of armour. And then they saw that it was human hair. Advancing upon them was a silver-haired clergyman. He was carrying in his arms a square wooden box; he walked gingerly to a window embrasure and set down his burden; then he turned to inspect the Applebys over the top of small and uncertainly poised steel-rimmed spectacles. "Good morning," he said politely. "So you are before me, after all."

Appleby took a hand from his trousers pocket – it was clear that no five shillings would be called for – and contrived a polite bow. "Good morning, sir. But I don't think–"

"How quickly these things get about nowadays. I am most surprised. But, of course, your Society is always on the *qui-vive* – decidedly on the *qui-vive*."

"I'm really afraid I don't know what Society you are talking about."

"Come, come – frankness, my dear sir, frankness." The old clergyman shook his head disapprovingly, so that his silver locks shimmered in the thin clear sunlight which flooded the hall.

"The lady and yourself indubitably come from the Society for Psychical Research."

"You are wholly mistaken. If I come from anywhere, it's from the Metropolitan Police. But my visit here is entirely private – and, I'm afraid, unauthorised. My wife" – and Appleby looked at Judith with some shade of malice – "is keenly interested in old houses."

"We must get to work." The old clergyman appeared to make very little of Appleby's remarks. "But first let me introduce myself. My name is Butterly – Horace Butterly – and I have been the incumbent of this parish for many years."

"How do you do." Appleby presented Mr Butterly to Judith with appropriate formality. "I wonder if you will tell us what it is that you suppose to have got about?"

"I'm bound to say that I had come to regard it as a vanishing legend. For good or ill, these old stories are dying out."

Mr Butterly advanced to the chimney-piece and peered up at the carving. "The date is about right, you must agree."

"The date is certainly about right." It was Judith who replied, and Appleby realised with misgiving that she was determined to probe the intentions or persuasions of the old parson before them. "Today is the tenth of June."

"Quite so." Mr Butterly, much gratified, nodded so vigorously that his spectacles appeared likely to fly from his nose. "But I have heard very little talk of it, you know, of recent years. Only now and then, and from the older cottagers. The younger people – and it is they, mark you, who

are often out late at night, human nature being what it is – the younger people never report anything. Perhaps because they don't expect anything – eh?" Mr Buttery glanced at Judith with an air of great acuteness. "But then, of course, I'm bound to say I didn't expect anything myself. It was entirely a surprise. My mind, naturally, was entirely on the gamekeeper."

"I beg your pardon?" Judith was puzzled.

"No matter, no matter." Mr Buttery might have been supposed momentarily confused. "The point is that I have seen it with my own eyes. And so I feel bound to get to work." He turned back to his wooden box. "As you do too. Well, our purposes are not the same, but there need be no conflict – no conflict at all. A great deal in our present ills, if you ask me, proceeds from this disastrous notion of a necessary conflict between religion and science. I have a very cogent sermon on the subject, and I find that there is unfailing interest in it, year by year. I am not without the thought, indeed, of printing it and sending a copy to the Bishop. Between you and me, it might do him good. But here we are, here we are." Mr Buttery was now rummaging in his box. "Bell, book, candle – surely I didn't forget the candle? No – here it is."

Judith advanced and peered into the box. "You are proposing some sort of exorcism?"

"Precisely. Not that I consider the manifestation as serious." Again Mr Buttery glanced up with an air of great acuteness – which had, somehow, the comical effect of exhibiting him as a very innocent man. "I am not at all sure that a single White Paternoster might not very adequately meet the case. Still, one ought to be on the safe side. My reading inclines me to the

view that we are dealing with goblins. A really populous affair like this is commonly a matter of goblins. I have little doubt that we shall get the better of them."

"Do I understand" – Appleby in his turn had come forward – "that you yourself have lately seen at Water Poole a considerable concourse of what you took to be disembodied spirits?"

"My dear sir, you are perfectly justified from your scientific point of view in beginning your inquiry in this purely objective fashion. But I am persuaded that you know very well what I saw here last night."

"Can you put a name to it?"

"Of course I can. It was the Naseby Ball."

"Exactly – the Naseby Ball. And – as you can imagine – we are extremely interested." Appleby gave Judith a swift glance which might have been an injunction to accept without more ado the role of psychical researcher. "It would be invaluable if you were good enough to give us a full account of your experience."

"By all means." Mr Butterly picked up his bell, gave it what appeared to be an experimental tinkle, and then addressed himself courteously to meet this request. "The historical background of the legend is no doubt familiar to you. In the summer of 1645 Lady Elizabeth Poole – she was a daughter of the Earl of Warmington – gave a magnificent entertainment here at Water Poole. On any sober calculation, of course, it was no time for anything of the sort, and the ball was clearly intended as a gesture in the grand manner. The Poole's prized nothing more highly than their reputation for being both resourceful and gay – and indeed they are said to be so still.

But it took this great aristocratic lady, perhaps, to light that particular beacon against the darkness that was then closing in on the King's party." Mr Butterby paused. "One admires it, does one not?"

"And remembers it." Judith glanced down the hall as if attempting to picture the scene. "And that is the point, I imagine? Lady Elizabeth's entertainment became legendary?"

"So it would appear. On the stroke of midnight, the story goes, a messenger arrived from Prince Rupert. He announced that Sir Thomas Fairfax was marching with the New Model army upon Northampton, and that in a few days a critical battle must be joined. The ball ended instantly with a loyal toast, there was a bustle of martial preparation, and at daybreak the gentlemen rode away." Again Mr Butterby paused. "How vividly one sees it: the candles growing pale in the dawn, the women ashen under their paint and jewels, the men all assurance and arrogance and inflexibly maintained courtesy, but with thoughts only for their horses and weapons and accoutrements. Among those who departed were Richard Poole and his two sons. As you no doubt know, none of them came back."

"And the family never recovered?"

Mr Butterby nodded his venerable head. "It is perhaps true to say that the family never completely recovered – although Poole's lived on, the unquestioned masters of this place, into the present century. In the Kaiser's war the old history repeated itself after a fashion, for a father and two sons were killed, and the estate became impossibly burdened with debt. No Poole has lived here regularly since then. During the last war, when remote places were at a premium, Water Poole was let out and partially occupied for

a time. But now it scarcely appears that it can ever be lived in again, and I am sorry to say that the shooting and fishing have been leased to some very unpleasant people – commercial folk, no doubt – from London. The present owner of the house is almost unknown to me. He is a young man in his early thirties – a Richard, as most of the lords of the manor have been christened – and I believe he has gone on the stage."

"I wonder what Lady Elizabeth Poole would make of that? To think of one of her descendants become a common player would probably make her turn in her grave." Judith looked at Mr Butterby with sudden indiscreet mischief. "But perhaps it's that sort of thing that Lady Elizabeth is by way of doing – turning in her grave, or even rising from it on stated occasions to dance a pavane or a saraband?"

Mr. Butterby shook his head. "No, no, my dear madam. That is an error – I am bound to say a grave error." He picked up his bell again and tinkled it, as if here was something in itself calling for the rite in which he proposed to engage. "We must not suppose that the souls of virtuous persons, or their bodies either, engage in any such pranks. We are not in any sense confronted with true apparitions. Goblins are the explanation. I have not the slightest doubt of it."

"It is a most interesting supposition." Appleby interposed this with gravity. "But just *what* do they explain? You haven't yet told us that. We have only gathered, so far, that last night you witnessed something remarkable. How did it happen? Were you called out to it?"

"Not precisely." For the third time Mr Butterby tinkled his bell, but on this occasion what

appeared to prompt the action was mild discomfiture. "The fact is that, round about midnight, I was on the river. For purposes of meditation, and on a fine summer night, it may confidently be recommended."

"Particularly when there is no moon?"

"Oh, most decidedly so. There is a great deal of distraction in a handsome moon."

"I see." Appleby felt constrained to conclude that – astonishing as the fact must seem – this reverend old parson's nocturnal occasions were not unconnected with possessing himself of other's people's trout. Perhaps Mr Butterby was an instance of the shocking poverty of the rural clergy prompting to a life of crime. Perhaps he simply derived entertainment from outwitting, with arts learnt in boyhood, those unpleasant commercial people from London. "And being on the river, sir, you saw this spectral ball?"

"I did indeed."

"I believe you said that the occurrence of something of the sort is a traditional belief among some of the older people in these parts. Perhaps you had been thinking of it yourself?"

"Decidedly not. My walk from the rectory to the river is by a path from which there is some view of the back of the house, and I could just dimly distinguish its outline against the sky. I recall simply reflecting how lonely and deserted it seemed."

"There were no lights?"

"None. Anything of the sort would have attracted my attention and interest at once. For the astonishing spectacle which I saw later I was utterly unprepared. It came upon me, indeed,

with the suddenness of a *coup de théâtre*." Mr Butterby paused upon this phrase with some satisfaction. "I was dropping quietly – I may say very quietly – down the stream in my dinghy. My thoughts were occupied with – um – entirely other matters. In fact I was meditating" – Mr Butterby, who seemed to feel that verisimilitude and conviction called here for more specific statement, visibly paused for inspiration – "I was meditating upon the mutability of human affairs."

"A very proper subject for reflection, sir. And then?"

"I came round the little bend that brings Water Poole into view. It was all lit up."

"All?"

"Certainly this hall and its adjacent apartments. And there were lights on the terrace and – I think – the lawn. I was extremely startled."

"Naturally. And what was your first thought?"

Mr Butterby considered. "It must appear very absurd now – but undoubtedly it was of my own situation. I was struck by the impropriety and – er – inexplicability of my dropping down, at that hour, upon some private occasion. And then I realised that there could *be* no private occasion. For Water Poole, as you have yourselves seen, is an empty shell. Indeed, there could be no natural explanation whatever. And as soon as I had made this reflection, I noticed the peculiar character of the light. It was *not* that of a normally illuminated mansion."

"Have you ever seen this particular mansion lit up before?"

"Certainly – although it is now long ago. As you may notice, there is an old electrical installation of sorts. But the light last night was utterly different."

Appleby had walked to a window and was looking out thoughtfully over the lawn and the stream beyond. "Can you describe it?" he asked.

"A low, soft, golden light. The effect was strikingly beautiful."

"I see. And you have reason to believe that goblins command that sort of thing?" Appleby put this question with gravity. "I am myself inclined to think of goblins as restricted to glow-worms. But glow-worms would scarcely be equal to the job."

"Decidedly not. Glow-worms could not possibly illuminate a large party of ladies and gentlemen."

"And that was what you saw?"

"That was what I appeared to see. And I need scarcely remark that their costume was Caroline. It would not be correct to say that the effect was as of a canvas by Van Dyck – since, you see, from my point of view, it was all in miniature and in open air. But if you may suppose Van Dyck to have painted something in the manner of Watteau's *fêtes champêtres* you have the impression exactly." Mr Butterby smiled ingenuously over this triumph of precision. "I may perhaps be permitted to mention that I possess a great love of the visual arts."

"No doubt." Appleby was looking at the old clergyman in some perplexity. "Did you think to study this particular example at closer quarters?"

"I must confess that I did not. There they were – Caroline ladies and gentlemen strolling on the

terrace and across the lawn. Behind them – here in this hall – I had an impression of dancing, and strains of music were definitely detectable. My mental state was peculiar. I recollected the circumstances of Lady Elizabeth's ball but not, oddly enough, the legend of its periodical re-enactment. As is so frequently the case during an actual encounter with supernatural appearances, no thought of the supernatural formed itself clearly in my head. I accused myself of inebriety."

"It is a thought that might come to anyone. But I am sure there was no justification for it."

"Reflection shows me that there was not. It is true that I had ventured upon a glass of burgundy at dinner, followed by a little madeira. But I hardly consider–"

"Plainly it is not a supposition with which you need distress yourself." Appleby contrived a stern glance at Judith, who was displaying some signs of amusement at this exhibition of her husband's professional manner. "Did you think of anything else?"

"Certainly. I thought of those two Oxford ladies – learned and sensible women, they appear to have been – who believed themselves to have had an adventure with time at Versailles. You no doubt recall their story. They saw Marie Antoinette. It seemed possible that I had met a similar kink in the centuries and was back with the real Lady Elizabeth Poole."

"I believe there's decidedly something in that." It was Judith who interposed, and she spoke with decision. "It goes with what I felt myself when I entered this hall. It goes with what I *still* feel." She gave her husband a glance of some defiance. "Time has been squashed up like a concertina,

and it's only just expanding again to the dimensions familiar to us. I fancy that – ever so faintly – I can hear that music now. I fancy I can hear those people: the sound of their voices and the rustle of their silks. And I know I can smell them."

"Smell them?" Appleby was positively startled by this primitive assertion.

"Yes, John. The powdered hair. The scents – *their* scents. And their mere seventeenth-century humanity too. Mr Buttery caught them and we just missed them. I'm sure of it."

"I think Mr Buttery was not without a feeling that they might catch him." Appleby offered this rather dryly. "Isn't it so, sir?"

For a moment Mr Buttery looked quite startled. And then he blandly smiled. "I must confess to having been under that uneasiness. I should hate to be caught. By goblins, that is to say. Not unnaturally, they are particularly malevolently disposed to persons of my cloth." He produced a box of matches and lit his candle. "But I fancy that we can get decidedly on top of them now."

Mr Buttery was evidently about to open his campaign. Whether the manner of his announcing this constituted an invitation to participate was obscure, and Appleby appeared to feel that it was rather a tactful withdrawal that was indicated. The proper deportment for spectators during a ceremony of exorcism is not easy to hit upon impromptu, and his decision was perhaps occasioned merely by this. Judith, whose natural bent was for trying anything once, followed him from the hall with some reluctance. "Do you think he's telling the truth?" she presently asked.

"Part of it, at least – or part of it as he believes it to be. Presumably he simply turned his dinghy round and stole away. And now with daylight and the paraphernalia collected in that box he's nerved himself to come back again. Or at least that's the obvious picture. And I can't think he's making up that queer vision. Certainly you didn't seem to think he was."

Judith frowned. "I believe – I don't know why – that all these people were here."

"Did I say you ought to have become a historical novelist? Perhaps you ought to have become a detective. Would you care to be one now?"

"Assisting Scotland Yard?" She glanced at him cautiously, for it was not always easy to tell when John was being serious. "I don't mind having a go."

"Then just keep an eye on our reverend friend while I make another cast round the place."

Judith was puzzled. "Does the old gentleman really need keeping an eye on?"

"I don't quite know. He may be nothing more than an endearing clerical eccentric, much beloved by all the parish. But I have my doubts."

"Very well. I expect he'll relish a bit of an audience." And Judith slipped back into the hall.

Water Poole would take some time to explore systematically, and Appleby contented himself for the moment with a prowl through some of the neighbouring rooms. The place was none of his business. He had been decidedly aware of this as Judith had driven him up to it, and he told himself that nothing had happened since to alter this basic fact. Even a policeman should be ready

to admit that not everything enigmatical is necessarily nefarious. Even if Mr Butterby was a poacher, it was not a matter of which an Assistant Commissioner from Scotland Yard need take any very active notice. Nor ought he to concern himself with investigating an elaborate joke; to do so, indeed, was only to invite annoyance or ridicule. But yet...

He had paused in a large and gloomy chamber which had been converted at some period to the uses of a library. There were handsome shelves for many thousands of books, but they now harboured nothing but dust. Dust was thick on them, and thick on the floor. The sight was melancholy – but for Appleby it was finally and definitively informative. He stirred the dust with his toe. It was the first thick dust upon which he had come. One can't, in a hurry, do anything much with an enormous empty library. So it had been left out. It had been left out of the joke. But the hall and one or two rooms around it had been dusted. They had been needed for the fun.

The joke...the fun. Appleby prowled on, dissatisfied. There was one very simple and very obvious explanation of Mr Butterby's vision. Water Poole had been used for a fancy-dress ball. Or better perhaps, for a sort of theatrical party or green-room rag. The owner, young Richard Poole, was an actor. It seemed very probable that the old legend connected with his house had prompted him to organise what he conceived to be an appropriate entertainment there for his friends. This was at least a more tenable theory than Mr Butterby's of a kink in time.

As for goblins – Appleby thought – they don't drop cigarette ash. They don't leave candle-wax on mantelpieces. They don't – he had moved

once more into the open air – presumably leave a lawn something the worse for wear. When Judith had imagined herself to be obscurely sensing presences in the house, she had merely been letting these and other prosaic evidences of the late party filter unnoticed into her imagination. A perfectly commonplace if rather elaborate joke...

But goblins disappear at dawn, and nobody sees them go. The cock crows, whereupon they fade and vanish. And something very like this had happened. Any sort of large party creates a good deal of litter; but the litter left by this party was so inconsiderable that a trained eye was required to perceive it. There had been a deliberate care taken to obliterate all traces of whatever proceedings had been going forward. The probability appeared to be that, but for the curious nocturnal habits of the local rector, nobody except the actual participants would have had any knowledge of the affair.

This was queer. It suggested that perhaps Richard Poole bore no responsibility in the matter. It was a joke unobtrusively perpetrated, followed by a careful – and astonishingly rapid – tidy-up. Why? Appleby shook his head as he found himself confronted with this tiresome little, yet perpetually fascinating, key-word of his profession. *Why?* There must be a reason. Probably it was a harmless reason. Perhaps it was a quite stupid and uninteresting reason, and any beguilement an explanation seemed to promise was no more than an effect of the romantic associations of this lonely and mouldering house. Still, explanation must be possible. There was a reason, if it could be found.

He had strolled down to the river again. It must, after all, be termed something more than a

stream – for although narrow, it was quite deep and decidedly navigable. One could bring up a motor-boat – say one of those substantially powered house-boat affairs that were now so popular on the Thames itself... It struck him that he had seen no boathouse. Yet this was something which Water Poole must surely possess. The absence of anything of the sort intrigued him. He began to poke about.

There was certainly no boathouse on the bank – but the reason, when after some minutes' search he found it, was interesting. An arm of the river – it was in fact a cut, but of evident antiquity and perhaps indeed as old as the mansion itself – passed clean under one wing of the house. Each end was secured by an iron grille which extended perhaps a couple of feet below the level of the water. That by which the cut emerged had quite clearly been undisturbed for generations. But at the entrance the state of affairs was different. The grille was rusty and bore every appearance of disuse – yet as Appleby peered at it he had his doubts. It was secured by an enormous padlock, plainly manufactured in early Victorian times – and on this too the rust was thick. Appleby however found it of considerable interest, and performed some complicated gymnastic manoeuvres in order to get a hand on it. When he rose and walked away he was softly whistling a melancholy little stave of his own composition. Judith would have marked the sign. His spirits were rising.

And then he found the motor cars. They had not exactly been concealed; they were simply parked on the farther side of an out-building which only one rather pertinaciously interested in Water Poole would have been likely to visit. Both

were large cars, but one was a good deal more resplendent than the other. Perhaps it would presently be necessary to examine them with some care, but for the moment Appleby contented himself with feeling the radiators. That of the resplendent car was quite cold. The other was warm.

He turned and walked back thoughtfully in the direction of the house. He had almost reached it when he heard the sound of an engine behind him. He glanced back over his shoulder. An open car with a single occupant was approaching. He had just time to distinguish the figure as that of a young man when the car turned off the track and vanished round the outbuildings which Appleby had just left. He heard the engine stop. The suddenly restored silence brought him a curious sense of impending drama. The situation upon which he and Judith had stumbled had so far presented rather a meagre cast. It was possible, he thought, that the principal characters were now beginning to drop in.

Perhaps he should go back and welcome this particular accession. He hesitated, and then his eye fell upon one part of Water Poole which he had not yet explored. It was the totally ruined part, where something like a whole wing had come down. If, as seemed very probable, one of the new arrivals was the owner or some other accredited person, he himself had perhaps only a few minutes left for further investigation before receiving a stiff request to make himself scarce. This persuaded him to press forward, even at the expense of an uncomfortably dusty scramble. In a moment he was climbing over the mountain of rubble with which this part of the forecourt was filled.

As he progressed, he saw that even more of the house than he supposed had been gashed open when the end pavilion fell. A staircase, intact to the second storey and there breaking off in air, had the appearance of a hazardous fire-escape; below it was a tumble of stone, brick and splintered beams. Appleby surveyed this, stopped for a moment, and then quickened his forward scramble. An onlooker would have seen him vanish among the debris – and might have reflected that he remained invisible for rather a long time.

The principal characters were beginning to drop in. The phrase reiterated itself rather grimly in Appleby's mind as he made his way back to the great hall. It was perhaps because he was walking in marked abstraction that, turning a corner of the building, he bumped straight into somebody approaching from the opposite direction. It was a lady. Fortunately she was substantially – indeed powerfully – built, and took the shock well. Appleby steadied her and apologised. "I am extremely sorry. It was careless of me. One doesn't expect much traffic just here."

"Pardon me." The lady spoke with an accent that was unmistakably transatlantic. She was alarmed – but this by no means prevented her from being alarming. She was formidable – it might have been ventured almost professionally formidable, as if her everyday business was that of dominating large public meetings. And now she gave Appleby and Appleby's clothes a rapidly appraising glance. "Would you," she asked, "be the owner of this wonderful spot?"

"No, madam. I am not the owner." Appleby's glance was certainly not less searching than the

American lady's. "May I ask if you have just arrived here?"

"Just arrived?" It was discernible that the lady regarded this question as needing care. She eyed Appleby for a moment as if she were an accomplished chairman debating how to deal with a troublesome questioner in the body of the hall. "I guess so. Isn't it just the most romantic house you could imagine?"

"It has considerable picturesque appeal, no doubt."

The lady appeared to find this disconcerting. It was as if the body of the hall had produced something really awkward. "Why - I'd say it's just out of this world."

"I fear not."

This was evidently more disconcerting still - the more so as Appleby's tone might fairly have been described as sombre. The lady looked at him in some alarm. "And you say you're not the owner? If that isn't too bad."

"Possibly so. My name is Appleby - Sir John Appleby." He looked at the lady steadily. "I am an Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police."

The lady gave what in a less massively built person would have been a jump. "Does that mean-?"

"It means Scotland Yard." Appleby remarked with interest that at this information the lady turned quite pale. "May I ask your name?"

"Jones." The lady made this announcement with large conviction. "Miss Jones."

"And the name of this house?"

"Say?" The formidable Miss Jones was confused.

"Do you know it, or don't you?"

"Why, it's—" Miss Jones lamentably hesitated.
"Of course I don't."

"Then, madam, why and how did you come here?" And Appleby paused. "Perhaps you simply saw the house from the highroad and decided to turn aside and have a look?"

"Just that." Miss Jones, as if thus reminded that her business was with the visual scene, tilted her head and gave Water Poole a glance of unrestrained if somewhat hurried approval. "If it isn't a sweet spot. Would it belong to a lord?" She transferred her gaze briskly to a wrist-watch and gave an exclamation of dismay. She might once more have been the busy committee-woman with a fresh engagement pressing. "But I must be getting along."

"I am afraid not. It is unfortunately essential that you should remain. You will be kind enough to accompany me into the house and answer certain further questions."

"Accompany a strange man into a lonely and deserted house!" Miss Jones' tone spoke of the largest moral outrage. "I shall do nothing—"

"Here is my authority." Appleby fished in a pocket, produced what was in fact a driving-licence, and with shameless resource held it momentarily before Miss Jones' startled gaze. "This way, madam, if you please."

"I call this outrageous." Miss Jones delivered herself of her protest with energy. But she walked, nevertheless, in the direction which Appleby politely indicated.

Mr Butterly had either concluded or broken off his contest with the goblins. He and Judith were standing on one side of the fireplace, as if they had formed for the moment a defensive alliance. On the other side was the young man whom Appleby had lately seen drive up to the house; it was apparent that he had been in the hall for only a couple of minutes, and that the entrance of Appleby and Miss Jones was a complicating factor in a situation of which he was trying to take the measure. It was to Appleby that he addressed himself now. "Really, sir, I don't get the hang of this at all. Mr Butterly I'm more or less prepared to see - although I can't make head or tail of his talk at the moment. I have gathered before that he has rather a fondness for the place. But why you and these ladies -"

"We owe you a great many apologies." Appleby was entirely bland. "May I take it that you are Mr Poole, and that my wife has made herself known to you? And may I now introduce you to Miss Jones, a lady who has performed the astonishing feat of noticing Water Poole from the highroad? We are all quite frankly trespassers, and of course we must take ourselves off. I have no doubt that you find our intrusion most vexatious."

"I don't know that I want to say that." Richard Poole was willing to be mollified. "Of course one doesn't very much welcome trippers. But it would be churlish to cut up rough at the appearance of people with an informed interest in the place. Particularly" - and he glanced sharply at Miss Jones - "if they are American visitors."

"Miss Jones is certainly from the United States. She isn't, by the way, already known to you?"

"Known to me?" The owner of Water Poole was startled. "Certainly not."

"And you, madam?" Appleby turned and looked attentively at Miss Jones. "Do you know Mr Poole here by sight – or perhaps by name?"

There was a moment's silence while Miss Jones subjected this question to her customary wary analysis. "I'm quite sure I never got acquainted with Mr Poole before. I don't know many folk in this country."

"That gets something clear." Appleby indicated Mr Butterly. "And you don't know this gentleman either?"

"One moment." Richard Poole had stepped forward – slightly impatient, slightly perplexed. "Is there really a question of getting things clear? I am, after all, the owner of this place, and I'm not aware of anything of the sort."

"I have no desire, I assure you, to express any impertinent curiosity." Appleby's mildness continued to be notable. "But it is true, you know, that Mr Butterly has had a most perplexing experience here."

"To be sure he has." Poole's tone was politely amused. "Goblins and fairies at midnight – and as a consequence of his encounter with them he has been trying out some sort of exorcism. It isn't one of my own interests, I'm afraid. But I don't in the least object to his going right ahead."

"You just can't have been listening, Mr Poole, if you propose to treat the matter in that off-hand fashion." Judith now took a hand in the conversation. "What Mr Butterly saw was a whole ball – call it the Naseby Ball."

"Then I think he was uncommonly lucky." Poole glanced whimsically at the venerable clergyman, clearly determined not to budge from his airy

attitude. "It's a spectacle that seems commonly to be reserved for the very old. And also, I must add, for the simplest classes of society. Gaffer Odgers of Poole Parva is the last ancient I heard of as having been favoured in that way."

"You have never witnessed this legendary manifestation yourself?" Appleby had strolled to a window and now turned to study the young man in a full light.

"Of course not."

"Nor taken any part in – well, occasioning it?"

"No. I'm not a medium, or anything of that sort."

"You have never come and kept watch, even, at the appropriate season?"

"Good lord, no." Poole was again determinedly amused. "I tell you I don't take any interest in spooks."

"Nor very much in Water Poole?" Appleby paused. "May I ask when you were here last?"

The young man hesitated. "Can that really be any business of yours? But the answer, if it interests you, is about eighteen months ago."

"Why are you here today?"

This time Poole flushed. "Dash it all, sir, this is a bit too much."

"On the contrary, it's not nearly enough." Quite suddenly, Appleby was no less grim than he had been with Miss Jones a little earlier. "Mr Butterly is an educated man in a responsible position. He gives a most circumstantial account of very odd goings-on here last night. And this morning you, sir, turn up for the first time in eighteen months.

Do you ask me to believe that this is purely coincidental?"

"I don't ask you to believe anything. I simply tell you to clear—" Richard Poole's glance fell on Judith and he checked himself. "I must ask you to be good enough to withdraw from my house and land at once."

"Possibly our introductions haven't gone far enough." Appleby produced a pocket-book. "May I give you my card?"

There was a moment's silence while Poole took the slip of pasteboard and glanced at it. His flush died away and his manner became uncertain. "I don't know what to say about this. I must have a minute to think."

"By all means. And I feel bound to emphasise, Mr Poole, that – however it may be with your arrival here – mine is a matter of pure chance."

"I don't think I want to say anything."

"As you please. But I think you have a story to tell, and that you had better tell it." Appleby paused and looked at the young man gravely. "There is one circumstance, of which you may or may not be aware, which makes this queer business upon which my wife and I have stumbled extremely serious."

Poole frowned. "You speak in riddles, so far as I'm concerned. I don't know what you're talking about."

"That may be so. At present, I don't intend to divulge the circumstance to which I refer. But I solemnly assure you that it is something which makes all concealment on your part dangerous and in all probability impossible."

The young man was impressed. "I still don't know that I ought to say anything – without a solicitor and so forth. It occurs to me that I have been breaking the law. I hadn't thought of it that way – and indeed the idea's fantastic. Still, I may have been trying to get money by false pretences." He looked at Appleby with a sudden odd naivety. "It's devilish awkward."

"It does sound as if it might be a shade uncomfortable." Appleby was mildly sardonic. "But I still advise you to speak out, Mr Poole."

"Very well. I will. You won't believe a word of my story, I expect. But you shall have it." Richard Poole glanced about him. "I don't mind your wife – or, for that matter, Mr Butterly. But I really don't see that this Miss – er – Jones –"

"Sure." Miss Jones took this broad hint with alacrity. "Mr Poole's affairs are no business of mine. If you'll pardon me, I'll be getting along."

Appleby shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't allow you to do that." He turned to Poole. "Do you think Miss Jones has simply strayed in on the party? There isn't likely to be any place for her in your story?"

Poole stared. "I can't think—" He stopped. "Unless—"

"Perhaps we had better take things in order." Appleby glanced around the empty hall. "It's a pity there's nothing to sit down on except Mr Butterly's box."

"Dear me! I have been most remiss." Mr Butterly pushed forward the box, and then found himself in some embarrassment as to which lady should have the offer of it.

"You'd better sit on it yourself." Miss Jones eyed the clergyman searchingly. "How old are you?"

"How old, madam?" Mr Butterby was so surprised by this outrageous question that he did in fact sit down without more ado. "Sixty-eight."

"You look ten years older. I suppose you drink. A pale-faced drinker, too. Do you know about your expectation of life? Remind me to let you have some statistics." Miss Jones paused in this astonishing homily. "It ought to be more generally known—"

"That's it." Richard Poole was regarding the lady with a sort of horrified recognition. "She has a place in my story, after all."

Appleby nodded. "I hardly supposed otherwise. But please begin."

"It's going to sound very queer." Richard Poole put his hands in his trouser-pockets and paced nervously across the hall. "Perhaps you know that I'm an actor by profession? In other words, my regular concern is with illusion – with creating and sustaining one or another pleasurable illusion. And that is what, together with a group of friends, I set myself to do here last night. My motive was entirely benevolent and disinterested."

Miss Jones gave a sardonic laugh. "What you call a charity matinée with an all-star cast?"

"We were none of us stars and it wasn't a matinée. The curtain had to go up at night – and any old night wouldn't do. It had to be a *dark* night. If too much had appeared – if the illusion had failed, you see – well, it would have been

just too bad. As it was, only a very remarkable combination of circumstances made it possible."

Appleby nodded. "Do I understand you to believe, Mr Poole, that this benevolent illusion did in fact pass off successfully?"

"I certainly supposed so. The only snag was its turning out that I might be suspected of having a motive that I'd never thought of. Quite suddenly, and out of the blue, I was presented with a totally unexpected moral issue. I failed to cope with it. It's before me still."

"I wonder." Miss Jones, although she had the appearance of one who feels it desirable to keep her own counsel, allowed herself this enigmatical interjection with some emphasis. "But go on."

"If you'll keep quiet, madam, that's just what I mean to do... I suppose we all have American cousins. I suppose even *you* are somebody's cousin. And *my* cousin turned out to be Hiram Poole. It's queer to think of a Poole being called Hiram – but there he was, complete with family tree. The genealogy was all quite accurate, and he actually had the thing hung up in his suite at Murray's. Hiram is a very modest man. In fact he is quite pathologically shy and unassuming – which is an essential factor in my story. But he is excessively rich, and it wouldn't occur to him not to put up in the best hotel in town. I found him there when I responded to his letter. I can't say that I was summoned, since what he sent me might best be described as a mere diffident hint of his existence.

"It is essential that you should appreciate my lively feeling from the first that Hiram is an agreeable figure of considerable pathos. His money is of his own making, I gather, and has

come from the manufacture of some nameless but certainly humble object of domestic utility. Might it be wash-tubs? Perhaps they are out of date. I just don't know.

"It turned out that he had never been in Europe before, although making the trip had been a life's dream with him. He had nerved himself to it now only because it was his last chance. Hiram is a dying man. He told me in a fashion that was entirely matter-of-fact that his doctors had given him only a few months to live. Well, that has increased the effect of pathos, I need hardly say. But it isn't what has made poor old Hiram so attractive to me. He is thoroughly romantic, and this trip has been for him a purely romantic pilgrimage. That, to me, is appealing in itself. But he combines with it an elusive and wholly engaging sense of humour. Deep down in him there's gaiety. I think that's it."

"Isn't that a quality your family prides itself in?" Appleby had remembered Mr Butterly's description of the Pooles. "That and resourcefulness?"

"Hiram would like that comment – because the great point about him is his family piety. It isn't of course snobbish. Having identifiable ancestors in the thirteenth century would never occur to him as an occasion for giving himself airs. With him it's rather something for a large wonder. And I soon saw that he had been hoping for some deep draught of it before he said goodbye.

"In the last few weeks Hiram and I have done a good many showplaces together. Have you ever been to the Tower of London? It's perfectly horrible – the dungeon and torture chamber of England – but Hiram loved it. He told me about Pooles of whom I'd never heard who had come to

a violent end there. We had an ecstatic day at Hampton Court. All that sort of thing. And now you must see, clearly enough, where all this is leading to."

"To Water Poole." It was Judith who replied. "You offered to get up a sort of historical pageant for him."

"It was more than that. He has, as you can guess, a very strong feeling for Water Poole. But he hadn't ventured down here. He hadn't, I mean, made as much as a private trip to peep at the place. The notion of peeping would somehow offend his sense of delicacy. He was waiting for something. It was quite a while before I realised what it was.

"I did know that he had brought over from America with him a big County History published early in the present century, and the part dealing with Water Poole he had grangerised – I believe that's the word – with all sorts of additional cuttings and engravings. But his information wasn't very up to date – as presently appeared.

"I had asked him to lunch at my flat – I live just off Piccadilly – to meet one or two people who I thought would please him. It was a reasonable success, and he lingered with me after the others had gone. He had quite a lot to say in praise of the few old things I possess and keep lying about there; but nevertheless there was some undercurrent of disappointment that I didn't at first catch hold of. But in the end Hiram brought out a remark that was entirely revealing. 'This is certainly a pleasant apartment, Richard,' he said. 'But, all the same, you must find it wonderful when you can get away from London to Water Poole.'

"As you can see, there would have been only one honest reply to make. But for a moment I hesitated – it seemed so wicked to disillusion the old chap – and after that I was lost."

There was a moment's silence, broken by Judith. "And then you set about the business of what you call creating and sustaining a pleasurable illusion? You allowed it to be supposed that Water Poole is a going concern?"

"Just that. I won't tell you how, in half an hour's talk, I was hopelessly edged into it. Such a lamentable piece of weakness doesn't make comfortable remembering. The crucial point was that I found Hiram to set tremendous store by the notion that I lived here. He called it keeping the flag flying, sticking to our guns, and that sort of thing. You see, he may have spent his life giving better and brighter wash-tubs to a great democracy, but at heart Hiram is an aristocrat. What made my position the more uncomfortable was the fact that there is nothing second-rate or silly about Hiram's ideas. He would take no pleasure, for instance, in the contemplation of grand relations simply leading a fashionable life. But he liked his picture of the head of the family with his back to the ancestral wall, and holding out against the degeneracy of the modern world.

"Well, here I was in a false position, and there was only one factor which might possibly save me from disgrace. Hiram's English visit was drawing to an end. And he was so shy – so reluctant to move in any sort of strange society – that he was quite unlikely to hear anything of the true situation here at Water Poole unless I told him myself. But of course there was a snag." Richard Poole paused, and then appealed to Appleby. "You can see what it was?"

"It was hardly decent not to invite him here."

"Exactly. When Hiram took his leave of me after that luncheon party it was impossible for me not to say something to that effect. To avoid it would have been utterly indecent. Of course I can see now things that I could have said. I might have declared that some theatrical tour was carrying me off to Brazil next morning. But no ingenuity of that sort came into my head. I did the only conceivably proper thing, and said that I hoped within the next few days to have some suggestion for his coming down to the old place. I could see that he was overjoyed. And as he went away he did, in his diffident fashion, say something quite positive. He would rather his visit didn't take the form of an active social engagement. His health was as I knew it to be, and his remaining vitality was sufficient for spectatorship rather than intercourse. That gave me my idea."

"Was it quite a new venture?" Appleby asked the question curiously. "Or are you in the habit of organising elaborate hoaxes?"

"I've never done anything of the sort before – and as a matter of fact it took some time to come to me. At first my only notion was of some procedure amounting to a confession, with the addition of anything I could think of to soften the blow. I'd have Hiram down, show him the place as it is, and say how much I hoped to get back one day. What prevented me from doing this was a scruple."

"I'd call it the honest course to have pursued."

"It would have been a sort of begging." Richard Poole spoke with sudden heat. "Don't you see? Hiram is a tremendously wealthy man. Showing

him Water Poole in its decay would simply be asking him to put his hand in his pocket. I found I couldn't do it."

"I don't believe him!" Once more the force of her emotions constrained Miss Jones to intervene. "And I shan't believe another word he says. It is perfectly obvious that Mr Poole contrived some disgraceful mercenary plot against his relative – his distant relative – and that now he is perverting the whole matter."

"Didn't I say I'd meet with incredulity?" The owner of Water Poole appealed this time to Judith. "But that is the simple fact. I had reached a position at which it became a point of honour to exhibit this house as a going concern, standing in no need of the wash-tub millions. I had a good idea, by the way, to what purposes Hiram was proposing that those millions should in fact be devoted, for he had spoken to me, very briefly, of his philanthropic interests and – as he called them – testamentary dispositions. But that's by the way. Here I was, thinking up some means of pleasing Hiram and getting myself out of a ridiculous scrape.

"Nothing at first came to me, and I let the matter rest for longer than I intended. Then I got a note from Hiram, telling me when he was due to sail for New York. He said nothing about Water Poole, of course, but in the circumstances this intimation of his departure could not be other than an implicit reproach. I was rather desperate. And then I noticed the date on which he was sailing.

"It was, as a matter of fact, today's date – and at that I had my inspiration. I became a demon – perhaps Mr Butterby would say a goblin – of energy, and by that same evening I had got

together a sort of committee of my closest friends. What had come to me was that, just at this time of the year, we could manage a sort of lightning revivification of Water Poole without raising any awkward curiosity in the neighbourhood. Anything observed, and anything talked about, would be put down at once to the lingering superstition that attaches to the place.

"Hiram, needless to say, knew the story of the first Naseby Ball, and I was sure that the notion of some species of commemoration would appeal to him. But I had an additional reason for making my party a costume affair. It was a matter of what you might call the psychology of successful illusion.

"My friends and myself were going to create the appearance of a house-party here at Water Poole, in such a way that Hiram could be asked to drop in on it and get the impression of that going concern. But in reality we should be actors putting on a show in a decayed theatre with crumbling scenery and unreliable props. For example, the whole business of lighting was going to be uncommonly tricky – probably there would have to be nothing but candles – and the project only looked remotely feasible because of that crucial fact of Hiram's temperament: his diffidence, and his unwillingness to treat himself to more than one entranced glimpse of the ancestral home. Even so, the project was technically daunting, and I soon saw that our only chance was this: *that our illusion should be of an illusion*. If we were all confessedly engaged in creating a fiction, then the basic fiction – or the fiction within the fiction, so to speak – might be something we could get away with."

"Your plan was undoubtedly a very clever one." Appleby glanced at Richard Poole with what might have been reluctant admiration. "Did it occur to you that if your cousin detected the fraud it would be very much more painful for him than a frank statement of the truth?"

"It certainly did – which is why I determined not to fail. And I don't think I *did* fail." Poole turned a thoughtful eye on Miss Jones. "At least, that's what I've been imagining."

"It all went like clockwork?"

"Yes. We moved in with several vans just after dark. The decor had been planned in minute detail beforehand, and there wasn't a hitch. When my cousin Hiram arrived, driving his own car, I was on the lookout for him, and got him straight round to the presentable side of the house. It was clear almost at once – an actor has a sense of these things – that we were successfully putting our show across. Mr Poole of Water Poole was giving one of his accustomed house-parties, and his guests, with others invited in for the evening, were indulging in a historically appropriate costume ball. My only fear was that Hiram, in his unassuming way, would ask if he might quietly make a tour of the whole house. He knows its history well; and there must be various rooms – some of them perhaps now in ruins – with associations of great interest to him. But of course Hiram would never have dreamed of giving even that amount of trouble. He stayed just over an hour, moving about quietly with me among the guests, accepting a few introductions, drinking a glass of champagne, and so on. And then he took his leave. The whole thing, which had been so terrifying in the prospect, proved astoundingly easy. Long before dawn – the early

June dawn – we had folded our tents like the Arabs and silently stolen away."

"But that wasn't, in fact, all?" A sombre expression had returned to Appleby's face. "And it would have been better if it had been?"

"Precisely." Poole hesitated. "When Hiram left me it was plain that he was very much moved. Our imposture had been only too effective. It had been one of the deepest experiences of his life."

"That must have been rather uncomfortable for you."

"It was. He apologised for not stopping longer. He confessed that it had been a strain, and that he didn't think he had better take any more. And then he brought out the astounding thing. 'Richard,' he said, 'there's something I must tell you – in strict confidence.'

"We were standing beside his car. I felt instantly uneasy – partly because of an odd feeling that we were being overheard, and partly from sheer foreboding. I muttered something about respecting any confidence he cared to make.

"I've made a mistake,' he said. 'To leave money out of the family – a family like *our* family – is utterly wrong. This night has been a revelation to me. You stand by the old ways, Richard – and I know enough about the economic difficulties of this country to know that it must be against tremendous odds.' I could see his glance going back to the dark bulk of the house. 'It's magnificent, Richard. I can't tell you. I can't begin to speak. But you shall be my sole heir. God bless you. And goodbye.' And with that Hiram climbed into his car and drove away. And now you have the whole story. Of course he will

have to be told. I see that now. I've been a frightful ass, and I'm back pretty well where I started."

There was a long silence. Richard Poole produced a silk handkerchief and mopped his forehead. Mr Butterly, as if he were some aged anthropoid of an imitative bent, promptly did the same. Appleby took a turn round the hall, and on coming back addressed its owner quietly. "And where do you suppose Hiram Poole to be now?"

"On board the *Queen Mary*, steaming for New York. He was to drive straight to London, change, and catch the boat train."

"He was to change? Did he come here in fancy dress?"

"Yes. He had realised that it was the unnoticeable thing to do."

"A black Caroline costume with a gold-embroidered cloak?"

"Yes." Richard Poole's eyes widened. "But I don't see—"

"Your cousin is grey-haired, with a small scar on his chin?"

"Yes."

"Then I am very sorry to say that he is not on board the *Queen Mary*. His dead body is lying at the bottom of the ruined staircase in this house."

Miss Jones had fainted, been resuscitated, and at last accommodated on Mr Butterly's box. Judith had driven off rapidly in her car. Richard Poole had identified his cousin's body and was now back in the hall, looking pale and troubled. "It's unbelievable," he said.

"That is what you felt your tale was going to be." Appleby spoke very seriously. "Hiram Poole has died, so to speak, at the end of a decidedly tall story put up by yourself. There are various possibilities. Some of them can't be explored until we have a medical report. Others suggest themselves at once."

"Such as?" The young man looked at him dully.

"You no doubt see for yourself that it would be easy to set your proceedings in a very damaging light. You are a poor man. You have admitted what it would be impossible long to conceal: that you brought this rich American cousin down to Water Poole and submitted him to a gross imposture. Your own story is that he was prompted by this fraud to declare his intention of making you his heir. It may very well be so. But one can conceive of other turns that the affair may have taken. It might be suggested that you were aware that you had already been constituted, at least in some degree, your cousin's heir. It might be suggested that last night he penetrated to the nature of the charade in which you had involved him."

"Stop!" Richard Poole's face was bloodless. "You have no right to confront me with these insinuations. It is utterly irregular."

"My dear sir, I have no official standing in this matter at all. I am speaking to you as a private citizen; and at the same time I am giving you, for your own benefit, an experienced view of certain lines of speculation which the officers who will investigate this business may be prompted to follow."

"I see. Very well. Go on."

"It is conceivable that Hiram Poole drove away more or less as you have claimed – but that he had his doubts. Suspicion grew on him; eventually he turned his car and came back to Water Poole; and what he found in the dawn was a derelict house, and his hopeful young heir pottering round clearing up a bit of litter. He wasn't very pleased, and there may even have been a quarrel. So much for one hypothesis. We needn't follow it further at the moment."

"It sounds damnably convincing." Richard Poole managed rather a harsh laugh.

"It has, as it happens, one weakness. It leaves something out. I think you claim to know certain particulars of Hiram's existing testamentary dispositions? He had been proposing to leave his fortune to philanthropic organisations?"

"Yes – and to one such organisation in particular. The bulk of his estate was to go to a body advocating temperance reform. I remember thinking it odd in him. It didn't really cohere with the kind of feelings and attitudes that Hiram revealed when he was over here. But there it was. Prohibition all over again: it was something like that, I gathered, that his money was to go to the support of."

"Capital!"

Appleby turned in astonishment, to see Mr Butterby emphatically nodding his venerable head. "You approve of such an endeavour?"

"Certainly." Mr Butterby was quite excited. "I declare Mr Poole's cousin to have been most enlightened. The attempt to prohibit by law all use of alcoholic beverages is one which interests me very much. I think I can say that I approve of

it. I regret that it has never made more headway on this side of the Atlantic."

"Sir, let me say that you do honour to your calling." Miss Jones had risen from the box, advanced upon the clergyman, and was now shaking him vigorously by the hand. She turned to Appleby and Richard Poole. "Thousands will take fresh heart when they hear of the noble declaration of this truly reverend old man!"

"Thank you, madam, thank you." Mr Butterly – perhaps recalling that he had been termed a pale-faced drinker – appeared a little embarrassed by this unexpected effusion.

And Appleby was looking at him in surprise. "What about that burgundy and madeira? Would you propose, sir, that in framing their legislation our prohibitionists should insert a clause exempting the clergy?" He turned to Miss Jones. "I'm not quite certain that you and Mr Butterly are going to be at one in this matter, after all. But, for the moment, we have another sort of concern with it. May I take it, madam, that it would not be incorrect to assert that the urging of temperance reform constitutes your profession? Mr Poole, I think, has already had an inkling of it."

"It has certainly been hovering in my head for some time." Poole swung round to survey the American lady, and as he did so he produced a strained smile. "The rival charity – that's what you are!"

Appleby nodded. "Exactly. Water Poole or water wagon – it might be expressed like that. Which was cousin Hiram's fortune going to the support of?... And now perhaps Miss Jones will speak."

"I am *not* Miss Jones." The American lady had advanced to the middle of the hall, and her announcement was made with a very sufficient sense of drama. "Let there be no more subterfuge. I am not Miss Jones. I am Miss Brown."

"Not, surely" – Richard Poole, despite his awkward situation, was prompted to a freak of humour – "not, surely, *the* Miss Brown?"

"I guess so." Miss Brown's was a wholly modest acknowledgement. "I am Louisa Brown, Vice-President of the Daughters of Abstinence."

"It sounds like William Blake." Poole might have been slightly dazed. "Are they something in America?"

"Certainly. They constitute one of our leading temperance bodies, and the one to which the late Hiram Poole has bequeathed almost his entire fortune. And I have been acting as a guardian."

"Why should Hiram require a guardian? I never heard such nonsense."

"It's a precaution we are accustomed to take with potential major benefactors. Particularly when they go overseas." Miss Brown spoke with confidence. "Temptations are manifold. Haven't we just heard that Mr Hiram Poole was seduced, in this very house, into drinking a glass of champagne? Disgusting! Revolting!"

This view of the hospitality of Water Poole appeared to strike the owner of the mansion as decidedly offensive. "As a self-appointed bodyguard, madam, you have been thoroughly inefficient. Hiram is dead, and when you get back to your own country I sincerely trust that all the

other Daughters will give you a thoroughly bad time."

"You haven't got the picture quite right." Appleby intervened dryly. "It wasn't Miss Brown's business to keep your cousin alive. Her guardianship consisted in ensuring that, if he died, it wasn't with the wrong sort of last will and testament immediately behind him. It is a consideration in which there is food for thought. But we still haven't had Miss Brown's story. Will you please proceed?"

"I certainly will." Miss Brown put her hands behind her back and eyed the three men before her as if they had been a large assembly of recalcitrant brewers or vintners. "It was well known to me that Mr Hiram Poole had these unwholesome interests in family history and a feudal past. So when upon his arrival in England he made the acquaintance of Mr Poole – this Mr Poole – I realised that the utmost vigilance would be required of me. As a matter of routine, I got to know all about Water Poole. I got to know all about Mr Richard Poole's feelings for it – or lack of feelings for it."

Richard Poole exploded. "The woman's crazy!"

"For instance, I have in my file – it struck me as worth paying for – a letter from Mr Richard offering to sell this house for the purpose of what is called an approved school. He also had a project for turning the place over to a syndicate to run as a scientific pig farm."

"Crazy?" Appleby looked rather grimly at the owner of Water Poole. "I'd be inclined to say myself that there's method in her madness."

"Madness in her method, if you ask me." Poole was gloomy. "But go on, madam – go on."

"Murray's is an excellent hotel, and the servants don't gossip. But it was a different matter with the firm from whom Mr Hiram hired a car, and I was soon in a position to know most of his movements a day or so in advance. That's how it came about that, when he set out for Water Poole in his fancy dress last night, I was on the road in my own car a hundred yards behind."

Appleby was looking at Miss Brown in admiration. "That was very efficient, I'm bound to say. And just what did you know about what was going forward?"

"I knew that Mr Richard had been dashing round the firms that provide stage furniture, and that he had been holding long meetings with large numbers of his theatrical friends. I think I may say that I had the greater part of the picture already in my head. When we got down here, of course, I let Mr Hiram get a good lead, and then I parked my own car and explored the ground. I guess I hadn't got hold of the fancy-dress aspect of the affair, and the significance of that puzzled me a good deal. But the rest was clear enough. I saw that the moment to expose Mr Richard Poole had arrived."

"You were probably right." Appleby contributed this soberly. "And how did you propose to set about it?"

"I thought at first of simply walking in upon the feast and denouncing it - denouncing the imposture and denouncing the champagne. Then it occurred to me that I might, as a consequence, put myself in considerable personal danger. I might be thrown in the river and drowned, and the Daughters of Abstinence would never so much as know what had become of me."

"Bless me!" Richard Poole stared. "The woman might believe herself to be on the banks of the Niger, not of the—"

"Mr Richard and his friends were flown with wine." Miss Brown interrupted brusquely. "The expression is that of the great English poet Milton, justly celebrated for confining himself at the supper-table to a few olives and a glass of water. Any insolence, any outrage might be expected of them. I therefore skulked."

"I bet you did." Richard Poole breathed heavily.

"I was almost at Mr Richard's elbow when Mr Hiram made the shameful speech."

"The shameful speech?" For a moment Appleby was at sea.

"About making this dishonest and intemperate young man his heir. Then Mr Hiram drove off, and I hurried to my own car and followed. But he had a good lead and was driving very fast. It was many miles before I overtook him and signalled him to stop. He took no notice. I therefore passed him and edged him almost into the ditch. One sees it done on the movies. He stopped, but I found it very hard to open communication with him. I have an idea that he took me for a person of disreputable character."

"You must remember it was in the dark." Richard Poole produced this with obscure but massive irony. "And then?"

"It took what must have been hours – but at length I did contrive to explain to him the imposture to which he had been subjected. He refused to believe it. Finally I persuaded him to drive back to Water Poole. When we arrived, the place was already in darkness. I got out a torch

and led him on a tour of inspection. It was then that he began to behave very queerly."

"What do you mean?" Poole's voice held real anxiety. "Was he very angry – or upset?"

"He wouldn't speak. We went over almost the whole place with the aid of a torch he had brought from his car. And he wouldn't speak a word to me. I thought it most discourteous. There was one particularly striking instance. We had glanced into a small pantry – one from which a staircase runs down to some of the cellars – and it simply reeked of spirits. No doubt it was your disgusting champagne and so on. I drew Mr Hiram's attention to it as evidence of the depraved society into which his acquaintance with you had brought him. He simply stared at me without uttering a syllable. And then, when we had emerged again into the open air, we parted."

"Parted?" Appleby was surprised. "In what circumstances?"

Miss Brown hesitated. "He told me to go away."

Richard Poole laughed again – less harshly this time. "Hiram, you know, had very good taste. When he did speak, he said the sensible thing. He asked you to clear out. And you did?"

"I did." Miss Brown flushed. "I considered that my good offices had been scorned, and that I had been personally insulted. I got into my car and drove away."

"Leaving Hiram alone at Water Poole?"

"I guess so. Unless you were still here yourself, Mr Poole."

Appleby looked up sharply. "Have you any reason, Miss Brown, to suppose anything of the sort?"

Miss Brown hesitated. "I can't swear to Mr Poole here. But I did have a hunch that there was somebody lurking around."

"I see. Now, when you left Water Poole, however much you may have felt personally insulted, you must have supposed your work there to be done. Mr Richard Poole was wholly discredited. May I ask you why, in these circumstances, you returned here this morning?"

"Because I was uneasy. Mr Hiram Poole was an old man, whom I knew to be in poor health. And I had left him here in the small hours, after subjecting him to painful disillusion. I returned in order to make quite sure that nothing had happened to him."

"Well – it had." Appleby uttered this shortly and then took one of his brief walks to a window. "In the ruined part of this house there is a staircase that mounts through two storeys and then goes on to end nowhere. From that hazardous eminence, some time in the small hours, Mr Hiram Poole was precipitated. And there are still a good many possibilities. For example, we don't know – at least *I* don't know – what was in the dead man's mind. How did he take the revelation which it is agreed was made to him? Miss Brown, the only person to be in his company after the truth was revealed, quite failed to get any change out of him. That, at least, is her story. Suppose it to be true... Do you hear a car? It will be my wife with a doctor."

"I am not in the habit of prevarication."

"Very well. Your story is gospel, so far as it goes. But there may have been – indeed, if it *is* gospel, there must have been – a further and distinct act in the drama. Mr Richard Poole *may* have been lurking around – or he may have returned after you left, encountered his cousin, and become involved in some altercation with fatal consequences. In the circumstances it is a possible picture." Appleby paused. "I mentioned the chance of Mr Richard's being *already*, in some degree, Hiram Poole's heir – and knowing it. On that, the actual truth must, of course, eventually become available. For what my own opinion is worth, it is slightly improbable. But one fact is admitted. As matters stood last night, and still stand now, the Daughters of Abstinence are very large beneficiaries under Hiram Poole's will. And this bring us back to Miss Brown. Her story may *not* be gospel. It may be quite untrue."

"I am not in the–"

"No doubt, madam. But there are tight corners in which the most inflexibly truthful persons find themselves a little inclined to stretch a point. Suppose that this investigation of the true state of Water Poole brought both Hiram Poole and yourself to the top of that staircase. He had been silent. You became vehement in your denunciation of Mr Richard. And then Hiram Poole did something which surprised you very much, but which in fact was thoroughly consonant with human nature. He cried a plague on both your houses."

"He did what?" Miss Brown was both startled and at a loss.

"He declared that Richard should not have a penny of his. And then he said precisely the same thing about the Daughters of Abstinence."

"He would never do such a thing."

"I repeat that I think it extremely likely that he would. Your organisation had set a spy on him, and subjected him to an acute humiliation of which you, madam, cannot have the faintest imaginative understanding. So here is another sober possibility. Up there, at the top of that crazy staircase, this old man told you that your organisation would be struck out of his will tomorrow."

Miss Brown was silent – and suddenly old and spectral. Richard Poole looked at her not unkindly and then turned to Appleby. "I must say you have considerable skill in making it uncomfortable for everybody in turn. Is there more to come? What about Mr Butter?"

And Appleby nodded. "I'm coming to Mr Butter now."

"To me?" Over his steel-rimmed spectacles the clergyman looked at Appleby in naïve alarm. "I fear all this has been incomprehensible to me, and that I am unlikely to be able to assist. Here and there – on the goblin side of the thing – I am fairly clear. But all this of wills eludes me. Mr Poole, it seems, has told one story; this lady who keeps on changing her name has told another; and I suppose you, sir, must choose between them."

Appleby shook his head. "That may be unnecessary. I have myself ventured some alternative hypotheses which are no doubt mutually exclusive. But the stories of Mr Poole and Miss Brown do not in themselves contradict each other. Both may have told as much of the truth as they know. And now it is up to you to tell the rest."

Mr Buttery considered this injunction for a moment in silence. Then, disconcertingly, his venerable features assumed an expression of the deepest cunning. "I suppose," he asked, "that what is called motive is of great importance in a matter of this sort?"

"Undoubtedly."

"You were asking, for instance, *why* this lady returned to Water Poole when she did. Stress is put upon things like that?"

"Certainly it is."

"Awkward. Troublesome. Vexatious." And Mr Buttery shook his head. "If I myself had what might be termed a *respectable* motive—"

"Folk-lore." Appleby was brisk. "Your own further investigations of Water Poole last night, sir, were prompted entirely by your interest in folk-lore. You were after the goblins, and nothing but the goblins. And now perhaps you can go ahead."

"I don't quite follow this." Richard Poole was curious. "Am I to understand that Mr Buttery—"

"Mr Buttery is a great law-breaker." Appleby announced this without any appearance of censure. "A little quiet poaching warms the cockles of his heart. But lately he has taken larger flight. He found, I think, a very tempting cellar, to be entered unobtrusively by a cut from the river. Perhaps he found some suitable implements and utensils as well. Anyway, he has been having great fun distilling illicit spirits. Hence the smell remarked by Miss Brown. And hence Mr Buttery's own enthusiasm for Total Prohibition. He feels that if that came in he might

go into business in a large way. But these are irrelevant matters—”

“Really irrelevant?” Mr Buttery was sharply hopeful.

“At least there is a very good chance of it. Last night, sir, you watched the goblins in some alarm until they packed up. And then you came to investigate. They are said, after all, to do terrible things in dairies. Perhaps they might have been behaving equally mischievously in your distillery.”

“I certainly waited in my dinghy until all was dark and silent again.” Mr Buttery now spoke with much placidity. “It was a tedious vigil. I was not however greatly surprised. For goblins, as you know, have a great reputation for keeping it up till dawn. Gradually their lights went out, and I was conscious of intermittent rumblings. Parties of them were returning to the nether world.”

“Or our vans were driving away.” Richard Poole was looking at the clergyman in some perplexity, as if finding it hard to gauge just how deep his eccentricity went.

“When at length I ventured to land they had all vanished – as our national poet puts it, following darkness like a dream. Or all, that is, except the Goblin King.”

“The Goblin King?” Miss Brown, whose spirits appeared to be a little revived, interrupted. “Do Goblins have that?”

“Certainly – and he is rather a fine personage. It is a mistake, you know, to suppose that goblins are dwarfs, or in any sense little people. I was not at all surprised to find that the Goblin King was a most distinguished figure, magnificently attired in black and gold.”

"Cousin Hiram!"

"With him he had an obscure familiar. I caught only glimpses, you know. As I remarked earlier, it is very dangerous for the clergy to get involved with goblins. So the utmost circumspection was necessary. The Goblin King had some species of lantern. I had to be very careful to keep out of its beam; and it was only from the oblique light coming from it that I could distinguish him at all. The familiar puzzled me. Could it have been Hecate? I am more inclined to suppose a minor Teutonic divinity. Possibly the Sow Goddess." Mr Buttery looked ingenuously at Miss Brown. "Would that appear to you to be a tenable hypothesis?"

"I think you are a very wicked old man." Miss Brown's response, if not strictly relevant, was spirited.

"Presently however the familiar was banished. This was the only occasion upon which I actually heard the Goblin King speak. 'Go away,' he said. I was much struck by his tone of authority. Without more ado, the Sow Goddess – I am sure she was that – took her departure."

Richard Poole looked wickedly at Miss Brown. "With more rumbling?"

"I should rather say with a purr. I am inclined to suppose some species of chariot. The Goblin King then withdrew to the house. In fact, he withdrew to this hall, and sat for a long time there in the window, quite still and silent. He appeared lost in sombre thought. When at last he stirred, it was because the dawn was breaking. He then began once more to explore the house. I felt that I had seen enough, and I slipped out to

recover my dinghy. I was halfway across the lawn when I heard the laughter."

"The laughter?" Richard Poole was startled.

"It came from high in air, and I knew at once that it was supernatural. Very cautiously I skirted the house – and suddenly I saw the Goblin King again, silhouetted against the dawn. He had climbed the ruined stair – climbed right to the top – and now he was looking down on all that part of Water Poole that is mere ruin. And he was laughing. I have never heard such laughter. It was, I say, supernatural – and yet all the gaiety and all the fun of the world we know seemed to be in it. I was astounded. I was strangely moved. Once more it pealed out – and then, quite abruptly, ceased. And the Goblin King had vanished."

There was a long silence. At last Richard Poole spoke softly. "He had vanished?"

"Yes – following darkness. Following darkness like a dream. That was all."

The silence renewed itself, until broken by Appleby. "Yes," he said. "That – I am very glad indeed to say – was all."

And Appleby and Judith drove away. He waited until they were on the highroad and then asked a question. "The doctor is quite sure?"

"Quite sure. It will be confirmed at the post-mortem. Hiram Poole was dead before he reached the ground. He died of the heart-failure that had threatened him for a long time."

"That's one way of putting it. Another is to say that he died of laughter. It was appropriate enough, for the whole affair was comedy. Once or twice it looked like crime – but it proved to be

comedy in the end. One can't consider that Richard Poole was very culpable, and he told the truth as he knew it. So did that tiresome but perfectly honest temperance crusader... But of course there was more to it than that."

"More to Hiram Poole's death?" Judith nodded over the wheel. "Decidedly."

"One can't doubt that young Richard's deception was something the discovery of which was very painful to him. Imagine him, sick and chill and tired, being haled around that derelict shrine - for it was that to him - in the small hours."

"And by a Daughter of Abstinence, at that."

"Quite. It must have been sheer nightmare. And any common man would simply have felt himself abominably cheated and betrayed."

"Any common man would have suspected the very obvious mercenary motive."

"Hiram had his dark hour, I don't doubt, hunched there in a window of the hall. But he rose to the thing."

"He rose to it."

"The Poole's are still resourceful and gay. Hiram saw it like that, and his own laughter attested it. I take off my hat to him."

WAS HE MORTON?

"Yes," Appleby said, as we strolled to the far end of his study, "I do keep a bit of a museum in this room. A sign of old age and the reminiscent mood, no doubt."

He pointed to a range of well-ordered shelves. "You may find them depressing. For these things connect up, one way or another, with every sort of wickedness under the sun."

"All of them?"

"Well, no. One or two recall affairs that would have to be termed bizarre, I suppose, rather than nefarious. For example, that photograph. What do you make of it?"

I found myself studying a formal, three-quarter-length portrait of a young man, taken full face and looking straight at the camera. A professional job, I thought, but of rather an old-fashioned sort.

"Attract you?" No comment had occurred to me, and Appleby appeared to feel I needed prompting. "Or do you prefer a man to be handsome in a more regular way?"

"The features are certainly irregular enough," I said. "But they have vitality. For what it is worth, then, your specimen does attract me. Was he a great criminal?"

Appleby considered. "Do you know, I didn't find it at all easy to say? But I suspected the answer

to be in the negative. You never heard of Leonard Morton?"

"Never. Is this his photograph?"

Appleby smiled. "Sit down, my dear chap, and I'll tell you the tale."

"It's sometimes said that if the whole population was fingerprinted the police and the law-courts would be saved some pretty large headaches. And Morton is a case in point.

"His parents had been wealthy folk who lost their lives in some accident when he was a baby. There were no near relatives, and young Leonard was brought up in a careful enough, but rather impersonal way. Nobody had much occasion to be interested in him, and he seems to have had no talent for impressing himself upon the world.

"You spoke of vitality. I suspect he shoved most of that into a rugger scrum. And by his companions there, I suppose, he was remembered only as so much heave and shove. He made no *print*, so to speak, as a personality. Which was awkward, in view of what happened.

"He took off into the skies one day – it was for the purpose of bombing Berlin – and ceased to be a recognisable physical object some hours later."

I was horrified. "Do you mean," I asked Appleby, "that he was charred to a cinder?"

"Nothing so drastic. But he was abominably burned. Or that was the story the world was asked to believe later. At the time, Morton was posted as missing, believed killed. No word of him came through, you see, as a POW or anything. Then the war ended, and suddenly

there was this mutilated man with his story – his story of being Leonard Morton.

"There was nothing out of the way in it. He had baled out; every rag had been blasted or burned off him; and he had for a long time suffered a complete loss of memory. And now here he was back in England, proposing to claim quite a substantial fortune. But was he Morton?"

"If he wasn't he had certainly *known* Morton – and known him as quite a young man, before the war started. There could, it seemed, be no doubt about that. If he was an impostor, he wasn't impersonating a dead man whom he had met for the first time in a hospital or prison camp. But here certainty ended."

Appleby paused at this to stare thoughtfully at the photograph, and a question occurred to me. "At which point did you come into the affair?"

"In the first few days. There was, you see, a time-element. For a reason I'll presently explain, it was important that the truth should be got at quickly.

"Sooner or later, of course, it was bound to be got at – although a bold imposter might well persuade himself it wasn't so. The claimant – as I suppose he should be called – hadn't materialised miraculously on a frontier of post-war Germany. He had come out in a train, and the train had had a starting point, and so on. There existed, as you can guess, a highly efficient organisation for tackling just such problems, and there was little doubt that in the end the facts would be run to earth."

"But meanwhile there was this time-element?"

"Precisely. Nearly everybody's relations with Morton had been impersonal, as I've said. Or, if not impersonal, say professional. Schoolmasters, holiday tutors, trustees, executors, bankers – and so on. They could none of them be confident, one way or the other. Quite early on they got together and held a sort of committee of inquiry on the young man, with a fellow called Firth, who was senior trustee, in the chair.

"Well, the claimant did pretty well. When he realised that they conceived it their duty to question his identity, he behaved very much as the genuine man might have been expected to do – if the genuine man was a pretty decent and forbearing sort of fellow. They were impressed, but by no means convinced.

"And then the claimant sprang a bombshell. There was after all, it appeared, one highly personal relationship in his life. Shortly before that bombing trip he had met and become engaged to a young lady. He demanded to be confronted with her. And the young lady, when named, proved to be the only daughter of the occasion's Grand Inquisitor."

I stared. "Firth?"

Appleby nodded. "Just that. And that was where I came in. Miss Firth – at least according to her father's idea of her – was a young person of an extremely delicate nervous constitution. And to be presented with a lover from the grave, and later see him unmasked as an impostor would be quite, quite fatal to her. So Firth came and besought me. Could I resolve the puzzle straight away or at least arrive at some confident opinion? I said I thought I could."

"And you did?"

"Yes. Not in a fashion that would have had much value if presented as evidence in court. But at least it gave Firth confidence in choosing a line.

"I did a quick rake round photographers who might have had dealings with young Morton just before the war – and then some equally quick work in our own laboratories and files. When I met the young man – whose face was certainly sadly disfigured – I had a batch of portraits, including the one that you see hanging here. I asked him to find his own portrait. And he chose this one. I wonder whether you can see what that enabled me to infer?"

"I don't know that I can."

"I was able to tell Firth that the claimant was certainly genuine, and that his daughter might be brought along."

This floored me completely. "My dear Appleby, I don't see–"

"I realise you don't. Imagine you're a tailor, and try again."

Inspiration came to me. "The button and buttonholes!"

Appleby was delighted. "Splendid! What is to be said about them?"

"They're on the wrong side. The printing has been reversed."

"Exactly. I found a photograph of Morton and had this reverse print prepared. The two looked substantially different, because human features are never symmetrical, and his were more irregular than most. *Both* prints were given him in the batch he was to sort through to find himself. You see what was involved?"

"I'm blessed if I do still."

"If he chose the positive print, he was choosing a Leonard Morton he recognised from life. If he chose the negative print, he was choosing a Leonard Morton he had never seen – *except in a mirror*. That, you see, was how I knew that here was the genuine Morton. And so – after months of investigation – we were able to prove with legal certainty. It was quite a puzzle. But – as I said – the answer was in the negative."

DANGERFIELD'S DIARY

"A criminological museum," Sir John Appleby said, "ought to consist for the most part of objects that are quite startlingly macabre. But my own exhibits, as you see, are quite uniformly dull. Look at that old diary, for instance. Nothing could appear dimmer – in the strictest sense. And yet there is a decidedly queer yarn behind it."

My eminent friend paused. "Now what – just at a glance – would you make of it?"

It didn't seem intended – for the moment, at least – that I should pick the thing up, so I simply gave the covers the most penetrating scrutiny I could manage. "It's for 1911," I said.

Appleby laughed. "It certainly says that much in gold on the cover. So perhaps you're right. Anything else?"

"It doesn't appear to me to be a specially bound or got-up affair. I'd say it's the sort of ready-printed, one-page-to-a-day, diary that you get from a stationer. No doubt such things were already manufactured long before 1911. But it looks good and expensive of its kind. Bought in Bond Street, in fact, in the old opulent days."

"Just that." And Appleby nodded. "Did you know that Ralph Dangerfield kept a diary?"

"The Edwardian playwright? I had no idea of it."

"Well, he decidedly did. Dangerfield kept a scandalous and compromising diary."

I'm bound to say that at this the faded volume lying before me took on considerable interest. "It's well known," I said, "that Dangerfield's morals weren't good."

"That puts it mildly. He belonged to a fast and raffish set, and it seems that he had the thoroughly undesirable habit of writing up its intimate chronicles from day to day. There was a run of these diaries covering nearly twenty years.

"On the day that Dangerfield died, his mother, Lady Julia, made her way into his chambers in Jermyn Street and burned the lot. It was high-handed, illegal and thoroughly sensible. Everybody approved – and no end of people breathed more freely, too. But one volume escaped, since Dangerfield happened to have lent it to a crony. It was for 1911."

I glanced at the diary again and wondered how it had come into my friend's possession. "You say there is a queer yarn behind it," I ventured. "Would there also be some queer yarns inside it?"

"You'll know quite soon." Appleby was quizzical. "Did you ever have a chance of viewing the Cinzano Collection?"

"Never. But I believe it was most remarkable."

"In its limited field it was unique. Just why Sir Adrian Cinzano took to collecting literary rarities and curiosities nobody ever quite made out. He had made humble beginnings at it quite early in his career – not long after setting up his first little business on these shores – and eventually it became something of considerable interest and importance to the learned.

"Indeed it wasn't merely the learned who were interested. To get the entrée to the Collection became rather fashionable. And Cinzano, who was immensely vain, exploited this quite a bit. He would give little dinner-parties, for instance, followed by a personally conducted tour. On one occasion – oddly enough – I was asked to one of these parties myself."

Appleby now picked up Ralph Dangerfield's diary. "And eventually we were shown this. Cinzano did what one might call quite a build-up before handing it round. First we were shown all the regular things – the rare first editions, the collections of letters by famous authors and artists and so on. But the great event was to be this wretched curiosity. Just how it came into Cinzano's possession I never discovered. Part of his success consisted in a flair for picking things up in unobtrusive ways.

"Well, the big moment, such as it was, came. We were all, it seemed, to be allowed to edify ourselves by taking a quick peep at famous names in sundry intriguing and improper contexts. There was some to-do over impressing us with how very confidential it all was, and then Cinzano handed the diary to the lady of most consequence present." Appleby paused. "Just as I now hand it to you."

It was, I confess, with some curiosity that I took Ralph Dangerfield's record of the year 1911 in my hands and opened it. Then I gave an exclamation of surprise. "But my dear Appleby, it's a complete blank!"

"Not quite. Turn to the first of May."

I did so. "There's a cross in red ink."

"Now try the first of June."

"The same thing." Then I gave another exclamation. "But the inside isn't for 1911 at all. It's for 1952."

"Precisely. And it was in April 1952 that I attended Cinzano's little party. It was all mildly alarming, was it not? The real diary had been filched from its covers. And what had been substituted appeared to be by way of a delicate intimation of certain dates on which there would be trouble brewing for somebody."

"Blackmail?" I asked.

Appleby nodded. "There could be little doubt that the missing diary gave wonderful scope for just that. Our party broke up in some confusion, with Cinzano imploring everybody to keep mum. But of course the situation was altogether too interesting for that: and by the next day all London – by which I mean all fashionable London – had heard about it. And on the next day, too, I went back to call on Sir Adrian Cinzano in a professional way."

"He had called in the police?"

"He had – and he was quite communicative on how he believed the thing to have happened. He hadn't, it appeared, had the diary out for about a month – and on that occasion he had shown it to a small party of complete strangers."

"Wasn't that very rash?"

"It was both rash and most unusual. These people had been Americans – university professors, he rather thought – and they had presented a letter of introduction from Burcroft, the eminent poet. Burcroft died, you remember, in 1952, and this letter of introduction must have been about the last thing he wrote."

"Unfortunately Cinzano hadn't preserved it, and there seemed no way of tracing his visitors. He agreed that the diary contained a great deal of scandal about bright young people of the Edwardian era, now in a respectable old age, which would be a gold mine to an unscrupulous person. It looked as if Society would just have to wait in some trepidation for the first of May."

"What a baffling state of affairs!"

Appleby shook his head. "Not at all. It had, indeed, only one redeeming feature – that of a very tolerable lucidity.

"One circumstance struck me from the first. I've already mentioned it – the oddity of Cinzano having invited an unfashionable Assistant Commissioner of Police to what turned out to be so remarkable an occasion. It looked as if he wanted a witness who carried more weight than a lot of bored men and silly women. But there was something more remarkable than that. There was his claiming to have destroyed Burcroft's letter of introduction."

"I don't see–"

"My dear chap, such an action ran dead counter to Cinzano's every habit and instinct. He had been collecting the casual scribblings of the great for more than twenty years, and sedulously corresponding with many of them simply for the sake of filing their letters in his precious collection."

"You mean that Cinzano himself–"

"Exactly. His business affairs had gone all wrong, and Ralph Dangerfield's notorious chronicle of 1911 was by far his most promising gold-mine. But it would have been very risky to

set up as a blackmailer under – you might say – his own name. So he staged that ingenious appearance of a theft."

I stared at Appleby in astonishment. "And what happened in the end?"

"I persuaded him of the good sense of Lady Julia. In other words, I saw to it that he burned the miserable thing before my eyes. And I pocketed this blank diary. He was in no position to object."

GREY'S GHOST

Tea had begun while a pale sunshine still sifted through the garden, and animation continued to be lent to the wintry scene by a group of children tirelessly tobogganing on the slopes beyond the village. But now, although the curtains had been drawn a full hour ago, our hostess' tea equipage continued to hold its ground, with the firelight playing agreeably upon its miscellaneous china and silver. The Bishop was the occasion of its lingering. His interest in the handsome Georgian pot was other than merely aesthetic, for he continued to claim cup after cup with a pertinacity that would have done credit to Dr Johnson. And in the process – but this may have been only my fancy – his complexion changed slowly from ruddy to purple, as if he were concerned to achieve a tint answering harmoniously to the resplendent garments into which he would presently change for the purpose of transacting the serious business of the day.

Yet this business – both dinner itself and our leisured preparations for it – hovered still some time off, and it was possible to feel that a mildly empty interval confronted us. To disperse upon whatever occasions we might severally own – say to attend, as the phrase is, to our correspondence – would have been at so informal an hour, a course of things entirely natural. But in an unpretending country house, little frequented by the great, an ecclesiastical dignitary is a

person of consequence; and it was our united sense that our hostess was not minded to a mere breaking apart and drifting away until the episcopal tea-cup had been definitely laid aside. And this was the exigency in which the young woman called Lady Appleby – the wife of an unobtrusive person who had been introduced to me as some kind of Assistant or Deputy Commissioner at Scotland Yard – produced her competition. She produced, that is to say, a weekly paper of the sixpenny species which she had evidently been turning over earlier in the day, together with the proposal that we should collectively endeavour to win the comfortable sum of three guineas.

Our hostess was enchanted – as it was her business to be. "Judith – what a wonderful idea! But is it a *good* competition? I hate the stodgy ones – composing sonnets and *villanelles*. Is it last words? I do adore making up last words for people. Bishop, have you ever tried?"

"Not, dear lady, precisely in the sense we are considering." The Bishop rose and moved implacably forward with his cup. "But I make no objection to the pastime – provided it is not massively exploited for purposes of edification, that is to say... Thank you – two lumps."

"There was such a good one only a few weeks ago. Attributed to King Charles the Second – or was it King Charles the First? That he must apologise for being such a long time in dying."

"Most felicitous." The Bishop offered this comment with gravity, and then turned to Lady Appleby. "But *is* it last words?"

"Not last words – just words. Three enigmatical remarks, accidentally overheard. Elucidations are

not required."

There was a pause on this, and I was myself the first person who was prompted to speak. "I think I can supply one straight away. I was once called up on the telephone, rather late at night, by a man's voice announcing, in considerable agitation, that Queen Anne was dead. But he had got the wrong number, and rang off. I never knew what it was about."

I cannot claim that my little anecdote was a great success. Somebody at once pointed out that the truly enigmatical was lacking to it, since what I had accidentally received was plainly urgent intelligence from a kennel or a stable. Oddly enough, this had never occurred to me, and I have to confess that I was a little discomfited. The Bishop I think observed this, and charitably took up the ball.

"There are undoubtedly some snatches of talk which will recur to one teasingly for years. Some of you perhaps knew Charles Whitwell, who was reckoned a barrister of rare promise before his tragic death? We belonged to the same club, and on the occasion which I am recalling I happened to pass close to him in the dining-room when he was entertaining a guest - someone quite unknown to me. And I heard Whitwell utter just four words. I believe they might qualify very well for Lady Appleby's competition. They were these: 'Grey's ghost was black'."

There was a moment's silence while we absorbed this - and then our hostess reacted with characteristic dash. "But, my dear Bishop, how marvellously odd! Grey's ghost was black! Did you ever find out what it meant?"

"Never. I had it in mind, indeed, to ask Whitwell one day. I knew him quite well enough to do so. But then, of course, he was killed in the Alps. His guest I never saw again – nor could I very well have tackled him if I had. So there it is: Grey's ghost was black."

"I think it had something to do with heredity." Lady Appleby offered this odd opinion with every appearance of confidence. "Mendelian theory, and so on. Grey's parents had come from either side of the colour bar. And Grey himself was white. But Grey's *ghost* inclined to the other side of the family, and so was black."

"It *might* be heredity. But I think it was trade unions." As our hostess made this strange announcement she looked brightly and largely round. "Strikes, you know. That sort of thing."

"Strikes?" I said. "Trade unions? I don't follow that at all."

"If you are a worker and go against the other workers, aren't you declared black? I'm sure there's some such phrase. Well, as a ghost, Grey had done the wrong thing – worked too long hours, or something of that sort. And so he was black."

There was some laughter at this – I am bound to confess that I myself thought it uncommonly silly – and then the Bishop made a suggestion. "These are rather complicated notions. My own guess is much simpler. Poor Grey had either been strangled or burnt to a cinder. Or perhaps he had been involved in amateur theatricals – say as Othello – at the time of his sudden death. And so his ghost –"

This received general acclamation, in which the speaker's concluding words were drowned. A

bishop, as I have said, is a person of consequence in a modest establishment such as I was visiting. And now there was an unexpected contribution to the whole absurd discussion. It came from the Scotland Yard man – Sir John Appleby.

"These are all good speculations. But none of them, as it happens, is correct. I knew Whitwell, and I happen to know, too, the circumstances he was talking about. As a matter of fact, the Bishop was misled by only *hearing* the remark."

This seemed to me nonsense. "By only hearing it? I don't see what difference—"

"He missed the presence – well, of another capital letter. Black ought to be given one, as well as Grey. Grey's ghost was *Black*."

It took me a moment to make any sense of this. "You mean," I presently asked, "that Whitwell was really saying something like 'Robinson's ghost was Smith'?"

Appleby nodded. "Just that."

"Then it appears to me to be quite meaningless."

Appleby smiled. "It depends on what you mean by a ghost."

It was plain that the man intended to tell us a story. From his wife's expression, I guessed that it would probably be of rather a tall order. Whether I was right in this, my readers must judge. I shall simply set down Appleby's words, as well as I can remember them.

"Ghosts – the sort with which, at least in the first instance, I am concerned – appear to be rather unfashionable. One can see why. The cinema and broadcasting and television have all

tended to cut down people's reading time, and we no longer call for a prodigious literary output even from very popular writers. Ghost-writers, therefore, don't much flourish except in a few specialised fields. For instance, there is still a small class of persons who believe that their own social or public eminence makes it incumbent upon them to commemorate their activities and persuasions in a book, but who are a little vague about how actually to put the bally thing together. For these to hire some smart fellow with the trick of scribbling is an obvious and quite innocent resource; and there are certainly a few ghosts who are always available for that sort of thing.

"But Grey's ghost was different. He was much closer to the old-fashioned article, employed to amplify the output of a professional author. And yet – at least at the start – he wasn't quite simply that, either. He was called in, one might say, as a specialist. If Grey hadn't begun life as a painter, I doubt whether the notion of his ghost would ever have come to him. For it is the history of painting, of course, that is full of little specialists – dab hands at this or that – being called in to do their stuff in one or another appropriate corner of the canvas.

"I see that some of you have now taken a guess about Grey. And you are quite right. It is Hugo Grey that I am talking about – the powerful and sombre rural novelist who died a good many years ago. By that time, it is true, he had pretty well ceased to be either rural, sombre, or even particularly powerful. But to this I shall presently come.

"Grey's father, as you will no doubt recall, had been a Cumberland shepherd – as indeed all his

ancestors had been since long before the poet Wordsworth took to celebrating the monolithic simplicity of that sort of person. Grey himself had monolithic simplicity, and his greatest characters and conceptions – to put it mildly – weren't exactly noted for their complexity. But decidedly his people were above life-size; his secret, as his great admirer Sir Edmund Gosse said, was to give epic proportions to the figures of a pastoral world. That – and perhaps their dark strain of primitive superstition – gave his books their striking individuality. What the younger critics have to say about Grey now I don't at all know. But in those days his rural folk were compared with Thomas Hardy's and George Eliot's. Learned persons earned grateful guineas by comparing his works with the *Dorfgeschichten* of Gottfried Keller. There was no doubt that Grey was going to be an immortal.

"It was doubtless the beautiful directness and simplicity of his mind that led him to hire Black. He read in the reviews, you see, that his peasants were superb, but that he couldn't do the gentry. Perhaps in that case he ought to have done without them. But Grey's plots were always thoroughly old fashioned contrivances – it was one of the impressive facts about them that the rust positively flaked off his contraptions as the wheels went creaking round – and he always needed at least one gentleman, preferably a baronet, for such matters as seducing shepherds' daughters, foreclosing mortgages, destroying wills, and so on. And the reviewers would declare to a man that these patricians were intolerably wooden.

"Well now, when the patrons, say, of a seventeenth-century Dutch painter declared his

cows to be so good that you could hardly restrain yourself from reaching for a milking-pail but his dogs to be such feeble inventions that nobody would think to heave a brick at them, the painter – as I've remarked – simply called in a good dog-man from round the corner. Grey called in Black.

"I doubt whether Walter Black's name will suggest much to any of you. He had begun life in some quite obscure and humble way on the stage. His personality appeared insignificant and perhaps rather effeminate, and it was said to be in an effort to mask this that he wore his large black beard. But Black could write, and he had a flair for polite life. He became a novelist – not perhaps very widely known, but greatly admired by a few for his polished, witty, sophisticated creation. His range was undoubtedly narrow, and it was notorious that his imagination never moved outside Mayfair. Yet there was no question of the purity of his small, carefully husbanded talent. He was always very hard up, and Hugo Grey was probably actuated by genuine benevolence as well as by his own large simple astuteness when he made the arrangement he did. It was not suggested that there was to be anything in the nature of collaboration in a substantial sense. Black was simply to do whatever aristocratic or highly cultivated characters the conduct of Grey's plots required from time to time.

"The arrangement worked very well. The baronets and so forth in Grey's novels became full of life – you might say of really authentic baronial devil and *savoir vivre* – and people who felt they were in the know remarked how wonderfully Grey was assimilating the ways of

that higher sort of society to which his literary eminence had gained his admittance.

"Then something rather odd began to happen. I expect several of you can recall it. The baronets took to spreading themselves over more and more of the picture, and carrying their own world – which was of course Walter Black's elected world – with them. For a time Grey's novels were panoramic representations of English society, the polite and rustic components being mingled about fifty-fifty. Readers were enthusiastic. Professors gave lectures explaining that the English novel had at last recovered the breadth and amplitude of its glorious past.

"In the next few years the balance swung further, and Grey's rural scenes, although still wonderfully realised, became a progressively minor feature of the books. This was a gradual process. But at last something quite sudden and definitive occurred. Grey published *Storied Urns*. It was in many ways a brilliant novel, and some people maintained that the portrait of the old marquis was the most striking thing the author had done. But almost equally notable was something about the few rustic personages who lurked in corners of the story. They were universally described as completely wooden."

Appleby paused on this, and somebody made the not very penetrating remark that it was a case of the wheel having come full circle. And the Bishop interrupted some stout work with his teaspoon to put a question. "It was simply that Grey had been growing increasingly lazy?"

Appleby nodded. "I think it was largely that. No doubt he had been paying Black at so much a line, and it was to Black's advantage to contribute as much as he was let. Grey found that books

maintained their popularity with more and more of Black in them, and that his own profits were not seriously diminished by setting Black to do a heavier share of the work."

"Until Grey was really the dog-man himself?" Our hostess offered this with a great air of vivacious intelligence.

"Precisely. He just wrote in his rustics here and there. Eventually, of course, he grew reckless, and didn't bother himself even to do that. The Hugo Grey novels had become, in the old-fashioned sense, one hundred per cent ghost-writing."

"Surely," I asked, "that was extraordinarily immoral – and even positively fraudulent?"

Appleby shook his head. "That, I think, is where the Bishop's friend Whitwell came in. His opinion was sought – and sought by Black. Black had been a party to what, book by book, was without doubt increasingly a deception. But Black felt that he had been ill-used and that he ought to have some redress. The novels were now all his own, but he had to take for them pretty well what Grey chose to give."

This time it was Lady Appleby who broke in. "But couldn't Black simply have started again under his own name?"

"That course was open to him, no doubt. But his own name had dropped into oblivion by this time, and he may have felt that a fresh start was something too formidable to face. He appears not to have been a strong character. Whitwell gave it as his opinion, I imagine, that Black had with full awareness got himself into a mess, that the legal position was quite obscure, and that public reaction to any disclosure could decidedly not be

to the advantage of either writer. Black was so disgusted that he shook the dust of England off his feet. That is to say, he collected what may have been his last few hundred pounds from the bank, and went off on one of those aimless cruises that were so fashionable at that time. And the next thing anybody heard about him was that he was dead."

We were all rather startled by this. The Bishop even checked himself in reaching for another lump of sugar. "I hope," he said, "that there was no question of-?"

"It was all quite obscure, and I don't think there was anybody - except conceivably Grey - who was interested. But, of course, we are by no means finished with Walter Black yet."

"Ah!" Our hostess was delighted. "You mean-?"

"Just what you may guess. This is a ghost-story, you know - an orthodox Christmas ghost-story. Only the ghost in it is just a little out of the ordinary." Appleby paused and looked at us gravely. "As being a *ghost's* ghost, you know."

From Lady Appleby, who was sitting beside me, I thought I heard a resigned sigh. But when she spoke it was briefly enough. "I'm afraid there is nothing for it but to hear John through."

"But, my dear, we are dying to!" Our hostess had every appearance of being enchanted still. And she nodded to Appleby, who resumed his tale.

"You will see that losing Black put the eminent Hugo Grey in rather an awkward position. If he was to continue publishing novels he must either find another ghost-writer or go right back to his own monolithic rural stuff. Very sensibly, he

decided to retire. It is not a thing that elderly writers often do – commonly they just can't afford to – but those who manage it sometimes find that its result is greatly to enhance their reputation. They become, so to speak, honorary Grand Old Men, and are generously praised by those with whom they have ceased to compete.

"This happened to Grey. He became almost at once a venerable leader of the profession of letters, and all sorts of honours were showered upon him. It was on one of those occasions that the trouble began.

"He was being given an honorary degree at one of the provincial universities – Nesfield, I think it was. Just what happened is a bit obscure, largely because there is a tradition up there that the students should create a certain amount of liveliness during the proceedings. But the main fact is clear enough. While one of the big-wigs involved was making old Grey a pompous speech, telling him what a large whack of our glorious cultural heritage he was, Grey gave a sudden nasty sort of howl and bolted from the hall.

"Well, even in a Grand Old Man that sort of thing takes a bit of living down, and it seems that thereafter the unfortunate novelist thought it wise to lie rather low. It is true that some months later he did attend an authors' international congress and make a speech. But halfway through he was unfortunately and unaccountably taken ill, and was obliged to spend a week or two in a nursing home. There was a bulletin, I seem to remember, saying that he required rest. People naturally said that the old boy was breaking up.

"And now I can tell you his own story – for the simple reason that it ended in a small abortive police-investigation which came to my notice.

What Grey conceived to have happened upon both the occasions I have mentioned was a horrid supernatural visitation. The phantasm of Black had appeared apparently from nowhere, advanced upon him through the assembled company in a threatening manner, and then disappeared. And Grey – like Macbeth confronted by the ghost of Banquo – had been unable to take it.

"That was bad enough – but there was a second phase to the haunting that was much worse. Black's ghost settled in with Grey at home. This was naturally unnerving, and its calamitous effect upon its victim was the greater upon several accounts. Grey, you remember, had that strong streak of primitive superstition in him. Moreover he had retired to his native fells, and was living in some isolation about a mile from the nearest village, alone except for two or three elderly female servants. And – yet again – the uncanny visitation took place during a particularly hard winter, while Grey was totally without visitors from week's end to week's end.

"At first the ghost's behaviour was rather colourless. It just came and went, without seeming to be aware of Grey, and without any suggestion of intent. Well, that is how ghosts *do* behave. I mean, of course, *real* ghosts as distinct from story-book ones. And Grey, who was quite well up in psychical research, became convinced that he was dealing with what the textbooks call a veridical phantasm of the dead. That, in a way, ought to have eased his mind, since there is abundant evidence that real ghosts are almost pathetically harmless. But it is plain that, in point of fact, the thing steadily wore him down. And then Black's ghost *did* begin attending to him,

and *did* seem to be cherishing some design. Grey would wake up to find the phantom glaring at him over its great beard – and it would then raise an arm, point, and glide from the room. On one occasion he plucked up courage to get out of bed and follow it – only to have the embarrassment of finding himself tumbling into the arms of his cook. As he was dressed only in pyjamas, and as she was a comparatively new employee, this upset him very much. Apparently – quite without knowing it – he had taken to giving a bit of a yelp as soon as the apparition showed up, and on this occasion the woman had heard him and come to investigate.

"The climax came on Christmas Eve. Hitherto the ghost had only appeared to Grey when he was in his bedroom. He was quite unprepared, therefore, for the experience that befell him shortly after dinner. He commonly finished the day, it seems, in his study – a long, low, book-lined room on the ground floor. Although he had given up writing in any large way he still produced an occasional Grand Old Man's review, and for this purpose he kept a typewriter on a table at the far end of the room.

"He was surprised, as he entered, to hear the sound of this machine in operation. He was more surprised still when, by the light of a small lamp standing on the table, he saw nothing but an empty chair – and the typewriter at work under the plain impulsion of a supernatural agency. For there could be no doubt of it: the keys were flicking up and down, the carriage moving to and fro, and the little bell going *ping*, although there wasn't a soul in the room but himself.

"Grey had just grasped the full horror of this when the machine stopped, and at the same time

he heard a low laugh behind him. He swung round – and there was Black's ghost practically at his elbow. The ghost pointed down the room towards the typewriter, paused for a moment, and then vanished behind a window-curtain.

"It seems that Grey was almost hypnotised. He moved dully down the room, took the paper from the machine, and read it. Of what he read, all I need give you is the heading. 'A full and free confession by me, Hugo Grey, of my evil profiting by the genius and labour of Walter Black.' There followed a detailed statement and a space for a signature. The phantasm, it appeared, had a thoroughly businesslike side.

"Grey felt his reason deserting him, and he dragged himself off to his bedroom with some notion of lying down and composing himself. I needn't tell you that the spectre was waiting for him. But this time there was a difference. Hitherto its appearances had been fleeting, and had always obeyed whatever normal optical conditions the actual lighting of the room might be expected to impose. This time it remained steadily in evidence, but in a fluctuating light which Grey felt to be quite unnatural. And now as he stared at the apparition something unprecedented happened. The form and features of the ferociously bearded Black melted, faded, and re-formed – re-formed themselves into the very figure and lineaments of Grey himself. He was confronting his own image – confronting a hideously ingenious commentary, one might say, upon his own ambiguous relationship to another man. Once more – does it not? – the wheel comes full circle. We began with the proposition that Grey's ghost was Black. And here, finally, Black's ghost is Grey."

Appleby paused on this – as well he might. The Bishop – and it was with an air of finality at last – put down his cup. “A pretty tableau, Sir John. But one seeming to require for its resolution a decided *coup de théâtre*.”

“And that is precisely what turned up. You remember it was Christmas Eve? Well at this identical agonising moment there came a burst of singing from outside the house. It was a group of carol singers who had made their way with some pertinacity to Grey’s remote dwelling. Theirs was the first incursion of an outer world there for weeks – and it broke a spell. Grey found himself reaching for the first object he could lay his hand on – I believe it was a hair-brush – and hurling it with all his might at that spine-chilling simulacrum of himself. There was a crash of glass and the image vanished. And at that Grey fainted away.

“He came to in the presence of his housekeeper and his cook – and plainly delirious. They sent for a doctor. And the housekeeper, who appears to have been a shrewd woman, sent also for the police. When they arrived they found the cook rather hastily packing her trunk. Or rather – need I say it? – *his* trunk.”

“Black – the living Black!” Our hostess, having achieved this powerful feat of mind, delightedly clapped her hands.

“Precisely. Black’s supposed death had been the beginning of an ingenious plot which he was peculiarly well-fitted to carry out. You will remember that beneath his great beard he was an effeminate little man, and his early training had made impersonation easy. Moreover that obscure theatrical start had, it seems, been as a

magician, and the trick typewriter had been one of his most successful properties."

"But the business of the dissolving ghosts?" Our hostess was all acuteness.

"It required nothing more elaborate than a couple of lamps, a dimmer controlling them, and the large mirror on Grey's own wardrobe."

"And so the truth came out?"

"Dear me, no. An *éclairissement* would still have been to the advantage of nobody, and so the whole odd business was hushed up. That is how I came into it myself. My opinion was asked about whether the local police might reasonably drop their inquiries."

"And poor Black remained entirely obscure?"

"Entirely." Appleby smiled blandly. "That is apparent from the fact that none of you has ever heard of him."

"But of course we have all heard of the eminent Grey." It was Lady Appleby who delivered herself of this – and I fancied she gave her husband rather a grim look. "We have all – at least tacitly – acknowledged our familiarity with his works. My own favourite, I confess, is *Storied Urns*. Bishop, what is your favourite Grey?"

There was a second's silence. It was brilliantly broken by our hostess. "My dears!" she cried – and once more clapped her hands. "My dears – just look at the clock!"

FALSE COLOURS

The Appleby children were playing Happy Families – and clamorously assuring their nurse that there was time for one more game – when we looked in to say goodnight. “Mr Bones the Butcher,” Appleby murmured as we came away. “It reminds me of Mr Green the Greengrocer. He was murdered, poor chap.”

I saw that there was a good chance of the story. “I don’t suppose it was among your more interesting cases,” I said. “Dead or alive, greengrocers must be rather dull.”

It was this deftly stupid remark – I flatter myself – that did the trick. “Dull?” Appleby repeated, as we returned to his study. “I don’t know that poor Green’s case was exactly that. It had its curious side.” He glanced at me and smiled good-humouredly, as if well aware of what I was up to. “All right,” he added. “Here goes.”

“Do you know Redchurch? It was no more than a hamlet until a few years ago, when some astute chap noticed something about roads and railways that made it, potentially, rather a good distribution centre. I think that’s the word. Anyway, the result was the establishing of a big mail-order concern, called Quickpak, complete with a new housing estate for the people employed in it. Mr Green, like most of the Redchurch shopkeepers, was delighted. With great enterprise he sold his horse and cart,

bought a small green motor-van, and went round delivering his greengroceries in that."

"Keenly progressive," I said. "No green in his eye."

"Quite so. But he got murdered, all the same. And there seemed to be absolutely no sense in it. A harmless petty tradesman."

"Of blameless domestic life?"

Appleby nodded. "An acute question, my dear chap. But there was absolutely no betrayed female, jealous husband, or other by-product of moral obliquity in the background. There wasn't even a dismissed shop-assistant or a disgruntled rival. Green's murder seemed utterly without a motive."

"Perhaps," I hazarded, "he wasn't what he seemed? The cabbages and cauliflowers were a blind, and Green was really a blackmailer or a fence or a spy?"

"Sailing under false colours, so to speak?" Appleby laughed. "It was certainly something I considered."

"What about suicide?" This came to me as an inspiration. But Appleby shook his head. "Nobody slugs himself to death with a blunt instrument. And we had another very good reason for knowing this to be murder. There was a witness."

Appleby paused in recollection. "The thing happened at about eight o'clock one autumn morning on a stretch of road between the housing estate and the Quickpak concern. On one side of the road there's a canal, and on the other a high embankment with a railway line running along the top. It's pretty unfrequented at that time of day, but there is one spot from which

almost the whole length of it can be observed – a signal box, always manned, standing about midway on that particular stretch of line.

"The fellow on duty up there – he was called Dunne – happened to look out and saw the greengrocery van driving along towards Quickpak's, where Green regularly delivered vegetables to the caretaker's wife. When it was just passing from his field of vision, Dunne saw an indistinct male figure step out from the shadow of the embankment and wave it to a stop. He saw Green stick his head out inquiringly. And at that the man who had brought him to a halt raised some sort of weapon and gave him what was clearly a crushing blow on the head.

"Dunne acted with great promptitude. He grabbed his telephone and got on to the gatekeeper of Quickpak's; and then he tumbled down the embankment to the road. If you recall the lie of the land, you'll realise that the murderer was pretty well cornered."

Appleby paused, and I nodded as appreciatively as I could. "Smart work," I said. "But not really a difficult case."

"We're not quite at the end of it. Dunne was preparing to tackle a desperate man off his own bat when he received a welcome reinforcement – the driver of a mail-van coming along from behind him. The gatekeeper at Quickpak's had also summoned help. It was just as well. The vital stretch of road proved to harbour not one man, but three. I'll call them Brown, Black and Gray."

"My dear Appleby – no more colours, I beg!"

"Very well. They were Long, Short and Stout. Long worked at Quickpak's, and was going on

early duty. He was rather a sad case – a healthy, strapping lad, and the son of an admiral. For some reason he himself had been turned down by the Navy – and he just hadn't recovered, but drifted from job to job, and done a spell in gaol for fraud. Short and Stout had bad records too, having been confederates in various petty pilferings. They explained themselves by saying that they had been going after rabbits on the embankment, and they claimed never to have gone far along that road at all. They certainly had the paraphernalia, and a couple of live ferrets and several dead rabbits as well. So there you are. Not really much of a teaser."

I didn't know whether to laugh or be annoyed. "You mean," I demanded, "that this information was enough? You knew?"

"Dear me, yes." Appleby appeared surprised that I wanted to hear anything more. "If a perfectly healthy lad is refused by the Navy, colour blindness is a likely cause. Long, in fact, suffered from one of the two common varieties of Daltonism, or red-green blindness. To such a person, red appears dark green. Long was expecting that mail-van, carrying thousands of postal orders for Quickpak. And he mistook Green's van for it. You can guess the rest."

"Well, yes." I thought for a moment. "At least, I can see that you had a very pretty case against Long. But surely it would have been stronger if you could have got some way towards eliminating Short and Stout."

Appleby smiled. "We got all the way, as it happens. One hears a lot about up-to-date scientific detection. But one oughtn't to forget the old classical standbys. It isn't difficult to interest a couple of bloodhounds in two gentlemen who

have been going around with ferrets. And in this instance the sagacious creatures were quite certain that Short and Stout had been no further up that road than they claimed."

THE RIBBON

Appleby stood up as Lady Cantelupe entered his room. But he noticed that he had almost been so unmannerly as to sit tight. This was perhaps because of an obscure persuasion that he had suddenly been transported from New Scotland Yard to some West End theatre, and was occupying a good seat in the third row of the stalls. Lady Cantelupe had an air of projecting herself – firmly controlled agitation and all – over invisible footlights. This wasn't necessarily a matter for suspicion. It was just a reminder that, before she married the famous scientist, she had been an actress of some note.

But that – Appleby reflected as he placed a chair – had been quite some time ago. The lady was still extremely smart, but she was no longer instantaneously captivating. "I'm afraid the sun's in your eyes," he said. "Let me just pull down that blind."

Lady Cantelupe inclined her head – a little wearily, as if acknowledging that a notably clear daylight was no longer among her best friends. "Thank you," she said – and added flatly: "My husband has disappeared. He hasn't been seen since Thursday."

"And you've spent nearly a week thinking about it?"

The question could hardly have taken Lady Cantelupe by surprise. But she contented herself

with saying: "It has been difficult."

"These things sometimes are." Appleby was cautious. "But Lord Cantelupe's colleagues – didn't they wonder?"

"Arthur had been unwell during the previous week – nervous and strained through overwork. There was some misunderstanding, and it was thought that he'd taken a holiday." Lady Cantelupe looked straight at Appleby. "I have often thought that a person like Arthur should be watched – guarded."

Appleby smiled grimly. "It's not a thing that everybody takes to very kindly. May I have the particulars, please?"

Lord Cantelupe, it appeared, was of a taciturn disposition, and more than once he had gone off for a brief period with very little explanation. Lady Cantelupe believed – or professed to believe – that these were confidential occasions of high national importance, and that her husband had taken the shortest way to saying nothing about them. "But *entirely* without notice?" Appleby asked. "Has your husband ever gone off and left no word at all?"

"Certainly not when I have been at home. And if it had happened while I was away, I am sure that Butt would have told me. Butt is our butler. Or Mrs Davis, the cook, would have mentioned it. They would neither of them have been silent if Arthur had ever occasioned alarm. The younger servants would be different."

"And that is your whole household, Lady Cantelupe?"

"Except for our secretary, Charles Diamond."

"He helps with Lord Cantelupe's work?"

"Dear me, no. Arthur brings nothing of that sort home with him." Lady Cantelupe spoke with energy, as if she considered her husband's scientific work as some dangerous monster. And that – Appleby thought – mightn't be a bad way of conceiving it, if one was a little poetically inclined. "Mr Diamond is simply our social secretary. He sends out invitations, and orders things, and staves people off. He has been with us for not quite a year, and is most satisfactory. He succeeded a young woman called Parsonage."

"Who was *not* satisfactory?"

"Decidedly not."

Appleby didn't pursue this. A glance at *Who's Who* before his visitor was shown in had told him that the Cantelupes had no children. It didn't seem to be in any sense what could be called an abundant marriage. When Arthur Cantelupe as a provincial professor had found a bride in a leading West End actress it must have looked, in a sense, quite a brilliant affair. But then Cantelupe had gone to the top, and the stage had gradually found that the lady's services were dispensable. He had been decidedly a rocket while she might be unkindly described as a falling star. Of course their union might have been a gorgeous success, all the same. But Appleby doubted if it had quite that feel. Moreover, for a scientist, it had been a little out of the way. It seemed possible that Lord Cantelupe's temperament deserved investigation. "I suppose," Appleby said diplomatically, "that your husband has one of the finest minds we possess in England today."

"So they say, I wouldn't know. But I do consider that – except when he gets worried – Arthur wears very well."

She had spoken dryly, but with a sort of down-to-earth loyalty by which Appleby was impressed. "Is he often worried?" he asked.

"He has these times when his problems - I mean his scientific problems - seem to cling to him. It happens when he ought to have taken a holiday, and hasn't."

"But apart from his work?"

"I don't worry about Arthur." Lady Cantelupe spoke crisply, and again with a direct glance. "He has - well, susceptibilities. But basically, I'd say, things aren't too bad." She paused. "Of course, to get at what's basic in this life, you sometimes have to go pretty deep. Or that's my experience."

Appleby smiled. "Deeper than the Miss Parsonages?"

Although rather faintly, Lady Cantelupe smiled back. "Put it that I've always treated Arthur's moods as reflecting difficulties in his work. They've been manageable that way. And it seemed no different this time. Until, that is, two or three days before - before it happened. Then, suddenly, he seemed desperate."

"And then he vanished?"

"Yes - on Thursday morning. Farris, our chauffeur, was waiting with the car after breakfast, just as usual. And Arthur went out just as usual, too. But instead of getting into the car he simply turned aside and walked off."

"Hat and coat?"

"Yes - but nothing else."

Appleby rose. "I think, Lady Cantelupe, I'd better come round and make some inquiries on

the spot. But I've one or two things to clear up. I shall be at your house in half an hour."

Five minutes later, on the other side of Whitehall, Appleby was shown into the presence of a tall, grey-haired man who stood by a high window thumbing a file of papers in the bleak London daylight. The tall man turned and spoke with an automatic geniality that was belied by his jaded air. "It's no good, my dear Appleby. I haven't ten seconds for you. Not if it's the Crown Jewels."

"It's not the Crown Jewels, Minister. It's Lord Cantelupe."

"What's wrong with him? Got into trouble with a copper?"

"He's vanished."

"Stuff and nonsense!" The jaded man tossed his file on a table. "Eminent scientists don't vanish – or only in rubbishing films."

"Cantelupe's vanished – nearly a week ago. And his wife only turned up with the story this morning."

Impatience and incredulity seemed to drain from the jaded man. "You mean the woman's only just found out?"

"No, Minister – I don't. She simply kept quiet about it."

The Minister shrugged his shoulders. It was a gesture at once of relief and distaste. "My dear man, I know nothing about Cantelupe's morals, and care less."

"That's how one's mind goes to work, I agree." Appleby shook his head sombrely as the Minister pushed forward a cigarette-box. "The only normal

explanation of the lady's keeping quiet in that way is that she supposed her husband's disappearance to be more discreditable than dangerous. But there are possibilities that aren't discreditable at all. For Cantelupe, I suppose, *is* some rather special sort of scientist? It's what I've come to ask you about, before I take the matter over myself."

"You're supposing that Cantelupe carries the vital formula about town with him in his tobacco-pouch?" The Minister was again genially caustic.

"It's a picturesque way of putting it."

The jaded man paced restlessly across the room. Then he turned. "There's no doubt that Cantelupe's confoundedly well-informed. If something happened to him, if he cracked up and went to pot and jabbered, it would be most unfortunate. No need, of course, to be melodramatic. I don't think we'd all suddenly go up in a nasty green vapour. But unfortunate – yes."

Appleby considered. "There would be enough in this to make quite a big drive on Cantelupe well worth some crook's while?"

"Lord yes! What the spy-story people used to call the Chancelleries of Europe would pay up like a shot."

Appleby got to his feet. "Then," he said, "Cantelupe had better be found. Even, I suppose, if he's dead."

"Yes – even if he's dead." The Minister was unemotional. "Dining at the club tonight? I'll be glad to hear how you've got on." He pushed a button on his desk and picked up his file. "If you at all have, that's to say."

Lady Cantelupe must have brought her husband a considerable fortune from the stage, since their house was a large one in a fashionable square. Appleby's behaviour on reaching it was eccentric. He dived down the area steps and didn't pull up until he arrived in a roomy kitchen. "Good morning," he said briskly.

Two men and a woman were drinking tea with an air of considerable leisure. The elder man rose in an indignation that turned a little uncertain as he remarked the intruder's appearance. "And who," he asked heavily, "may you be?"

"I am Sir John Appleby, an Assistant Commissioner of Police. Mr Butt, I think? And Mr Farris? Just so." Appleby laid his hat and stick on a dresser and sat down. "Mrs Davis, I'll be very glad of a cup of tea." He nodded pleasantly. "And of some explanation of your conduct."

"Our conduct?" Mrs Davis, although she spoke in some displeasure, reached obediently for the teapot.

"Lord Cantelupe disappeared six days ago, and none of you took any steps in the matter. You could see Lady Cantelupe didn't know her own mind, couldn't you? She needed a lead. Think of the state Lord Cantelupe has been in for days."

"That's a true word." Mr Butt the butler spoke in a deep husky voice. "What they call a regular breakdown, to my mind. But I don't think we're fairly to blame, sir - that I don't. There was what Mr Diamond said: that his lordship had left suddenly for Washington top secret. Of course, we talked it over between ourselves, and agreed it was said just to cover up." Butt paused

uneasily. "I suppose you are what you say you are, sir?"

Farris spoke for the first time. "He's Sir John Appleby, all right. I've seen his photo. You'd better tell him."

"I'd never have expected it - not in good service." Butt shook his head scornfully. "A gentleman's own establishment is sacrosanct. There's an unwritten law. Mrs Davis, you'll bear me out in that?"

"That I will. A gentleman respects the purity of the home."

"Yet there the young person was." Butt sighed. "An assignation. And in his Lordship's own library. It was a great shock."

There was a moody silence. Appleby, sipping tea, let it mature. "You surprise me," he presently said.

"It was on Tuesday, sir - Tuesday afternoon. I was about to enter the library myself. But I paused. There was the voice, sir, of a female. In fact, a lady."

"But there wasn't anything so very out of the way in that?"

"I knocked at the door, sir, and the voice of the young person abruptly stopped. When I entered, what was my surprise to find nobody in the room."

"Nobody?" Appleby stared.

"Only his lordship, that is to say. And there's no other way out. In fact" - and Butt paused with a marked sense of drama at the climax of his narrative - "there's nothing but a cupboard."

Appleby finished his tea. He somehow found it easier to swallow than the tale he had just heard. "You suggest," he said, "that Lord Cantelupe, realising that he was going to be disturbed, stuffed his visitor into a cupboard?"

"Yes, sir. Trembling his lordship was. His brow was clammy."

"It must have been most distressing." Appleby looked at the butler with a certain sober doubt. "And what did you do?"

"I made up the fire and withdrew. Then I came straight downstairs and talked it over with Mrs Davis here. It had been distressing, as you say. And it was the start of his lordship's being taken really bad. He had been upset for some time before. But after that he was a different man – really desperate."

"And that's the only odd incident you can recall lately?"

"Except the taxi." It was Farris who spoke. "On the morning of the same day, that was. His lordship called himself a taxi, quietly like, and came back an hour later, slinking into the library with a great parcel. Nobody would have known, if it hadn't been for one of the maids poking around."

"Not his lordship's style at all." Mrs Davis offered this.

"First a smuggled parcel and then a lady who has to be pushed into a cupboard?" Appleby rose, shaking his head. "There's something to think about there, I agree – and I'm much obliged to you. And now I think I'll go and see this Mr Diamond."

The Cantelupe's social secretary was in the library – the room, in fact, in which Butt maintained that the young person had been thrust into hiding. Although he wasn't exactly rugged – not, Appleby told himself, a rough Diamond – he did have something more than the smooth manners and small-scale competence that one might have expected. Yet he was discernibly uneasy and puzzled. He might have been labouring under the persuasion that things had not only gone wrong, but had gone wrong in quite the wrong way. His speech however, was direct and entirely open. "I'm glad you've come, sir. This is the deuce of a fix."

"It's something that you're aware of that." And Appleby looked at the young man stonily. "Your behaviour has been most irresponsible. Six days ago, your employer disappeared. I believe your concern is only with his, and with his wife's, private affairs. But you must have as good a general notion as I have of his position in scientific research in this country. Something had happened that might be of the gravest moment. Instead of bringing this home to Lady Cantelupe, or yourself taking the responsibility of informing the authorities, you set about deceiving the household with the statement that Lord Cantelupe had left suddenly for Washington. Was there a word of truth in that?"

"No – there wasn't." Diamond had turned pale. "I might as well tell you the facts, I suppose. There's no point in keeping dark about something you'll learn as soon as you contact Cantelupe's lab."

"That might be called self-evident." Appleby was unsmiling.

"Oddly enough, Lady Cantelupe doesn't know herself – yet. Nothing I mean, specific. But she'd guessed, you know, what the picture was in general terms. That's why she's kept quiet for a week, hoping for the best. Hoping, you might say, for the return of the prodigal." Diamond paused, frowning. "My God," he said, "a thing like this turns even one's language dead common."

"No doubt. But it's a point, if I may say so, of a very minor interest. Will you get on with what you have to say?"

"It's simply that there's a girl that's cleared off too, and from Cantelupe's lab. A secretary who works for him. Marian something. Marian Page. It happened on Monday. That was three days before Cantelupe vanished in his turn. Or rather the lab got a telephone message on the Monday, saying that this girl Page was ill. I believe there ought to be some sort of doctor's certificate within a week, but I should think they're only beginning to make inquiries about her now. The reason why I have this information is very simple. I don't know the girl, and I don't think I've ever set eyes on her. But as she works for Cantelupe there, I've spoken to her on the telephone from time to time. I tried to get her on the Thursday afternoon, as soon as I heard about the queer way Cantelupe had walked out of this house. They said she'd been away sick since the Monday. They also said Cantelupe himself wasn't about. And at that I rang off and did a little thinking."

"Did you, indeed? Well, it's what I'm doing myself." And Appleby gave the young man a long, straight look. "Suppose these two absences, or disappearances, actually to have been connected. Suppose, to put it bluntly, that Lord Cantelupe and this Miss Page had gone off together in the

reckless pursuit of an intrigue. Do you consider that you had the faintest right to treat it as a purely private matter, to be kept quiet about in the interest of avoiding scandal and so forth?"

"I'd a strong suspicion that Cantelupe had involved himself in similar indiscretions before - and without the slightest repercussions on his work, or his loyalty, or anything like that."

"Very well, Mr Diamond. Now take the mere supposition itself - the supposition that Cantelupe's disappearance and this girl's absence from work were related. Isn't it extremely arbitrary?"

"There's this reason why it isn't: Cantelupe's relationship with the girl wasn't a straightforward professional one. For instance, he's got her photograph in this room - there, on the mantelpiece."

The room was entirely lined with books, but over the fireplace there was a large mirror. Against this half-a-dozen unframed photographs were perched. Appleby walked over to them. "This middle one?" he asked - and saw in the mirror Diamond nod his head.

Appleby picked up the photograph, looked at it for a moment, and then turned and walked back with it to the middle of the room. He laid it on a table. "A good-looking girl," he said impassively - and suddenly added: "Where's the cupboard?"

"The cupboard?" For a moment Diamond was bewildered. Then he walked to a section of the bookshelves and gave a tug. "I suppose you mean this. It's one of those concealed affairs behind dummy books. Doesn't spoil the symmetry of the room. But I can't think -"

"Never mind." Appleby stepped inside the small square space and spent a couple of minutes making a careful inspection. "Miss Page," he asked when he emerged, "never came and worked here? This library has a lot of office stuff: filing-cabinets, tape-recorder, those desk telephones, that typewriter. Yet you say Cantelupe never did any of his real work in the place?"

"Never." Diamond had looked startled. "And if the girl ever turned up here, it was without my knowing it."

"And you say you never set eyes on her?"

"Never."

"Then how do you know that this is her photograph?"

Diamond laughed a shade contemptuously. "I know because she's written on the back of the thing."

Appleby turned the photograph over. Pencilled in a neat script were the words: *Lord Cantelupe from Marian P.* Appleby looked at them thoughtfully. "Well," he said, "it's perfectly decorous."

Diamond laughed again - this time more easily. "It's certainly discreet. But, even so, it's a bit out of the way. Secretaries don't commonly give a nice photograph of themselves to the boss."

"Does Lady Cantelupe know Miss Page, would you say?"

"I haven't the slightest reason to suppose so. Incidentally, she makes a point of never coming in here - which may explain Cantelupe's sticking up the girl's photograph in this casual way."

"Then it won't perhaps be tactful to give Lady Cantelupe a receipt for it." And Appleby picked up the photograph of Marian Page. "But you can be a witness that I'm making off with it. And now I must go and make some inquiries elsewhere."

Diamond seemed surprised that their interview was over. "Well," he said – and his voice was ever so slightly jaunty – "I hope you've learned something here for a start."

"As a matter of fact I have. Quite a lot. Good morning."

Late that evening, as the two men dined together, the Minister listened moodily to Appleby's account of his investigations during the day. "And the girl – this Marian Page?" he asked.

"She has certainly disappeared. The lab got a telephone message on the Monday, saying that she was unwell and would be away some days. And her landlady got a similar message that afternoon, saying that Miss Page had heard that her mother was dangerously ill, and had gone at once to join her in the country. I've checked that the message was false. Miss Page's mother is quite well."

"People seem to have been a bit casual about the girl. Do you think it sounds like her running away with Cantelupe? I don't."

Appleby shook his head. "I don't believe it for a moment. And I don't believe that he shoved her, or any girl, into a cupboard. It's not the way that a man like Cantelupe makes an ass of himself. And what is suggested to me by the manner in which he left his house is something quite different."

"Different?" The Minister waited for a moment. And when Appleby said nothing he added: "But there was that photograph."

"There was indeed. It told me quite a lot. For one thing, I recognised it. I'd seen the girl – and with Cantelupe."

"Good lord!"

"It was about a month ago. I didn't recognise Cantelupe at the time, but I've checked up on my memory since. It was in a rather smart restaurant to which I'd taken my wife. Cantelupe was giving the girl dinner."

"I see. And what was she like?"

Appleby drained his tankard. "She was all right."

"You mean-?"

"It was a clear case, on its own high level, of the boss having infatuated himself with a girl about the place. She was handling it as well as she could. I expect she liked her job rather more than she liked him. A capable girl of strong character, I'd say."

The Minister considered. "That would explain the photograph, and its decidedly temperate inscription."

"Ah – the inscription. That introduces something else. In fact, the villain."

"The villain, my dear Appleby?"

"Just that. In tragic life, God wot, no villain need be. But this isn't tragic life, Minister – or if it is, it's criminal investigation as well. That photograph, you know, was leaning against a mirror. When I took it up, I saw the reflection of the back. It was blank. But Diamond realised he

had made a slip in claiming to be able to identify the thing, and when I was examining the cupboard, he supplied that neat pencilled script himself."

"Well, well!" The Minister had to make some effort to take this in his stride. "Would you say, then, that there was some intrigue between Diamond and the girl?"

Appleby shook his head impatiently. "No. Consider the sequence of events. Cantelupe, who is impressionable in ways that his wife has learned to discount, starts up this middle-aged man's passion for Miss Page. He turns worried and nervous – which is a normal reaction to such a situation. On Monday Miss Page vanishes, to the accompaniment of those bogus telephone messages. On Tuesday morning Cantelupe goes out and makes a mysterious purchase. That afternoon there is the even more mysterious incident reported by Butt. Cantelupe's worry then turns to desperation, and on Thursday he disappears too. And you remember *how* he disappears?"

The Minister nodded. "He walks out of his house, and straight past his own waiting car and chauffeur."

"Precisely. It's not how a man in Cantelupe's position goes off for a lark – or even upon some serious resolution to make a complete break with his whole past life. It bears quite another character – and one, I suppose, that is sufficiently obvious."

"Nervous breakdown?"

"Just that. Or what they call, technically, hysterical fugue. Complete loss of memory, and disappearance into the blue."

The Minister considered for a moment. "When a chap goes right round the bend in that way, isn't he pretty quickly picked up?"

"Not always. Sometimes he behaves with a sort of unconscious cunning that defeats even an active hunt for days or weeks. Thanks to Lady Cantelupe's delay – and the obscure and sinister role of Diamond – there's been no hunt for Cantelupe until today."

"Oughtn't this Diamond fellow to be locked up – or at least be made to give some account of himself?" The Minister had a recurrence of his mildly sardonic manner. "It's generally regarded as the right line with villains."

But Appleby shook his head. "If I'm right in the way I see this case," he said gravely, "then the last thing we want do is to alarm Charles Diamond."

Every newspaper next morning carried the story of Lord Cantelupe's disappearance. He was described as having been missing for several days. Scotland Yard believed that he was suffering from loss of memory. Importance was attached to reports that a man answering to his description had been seen in Cambridge, behaving in a dazed manner that had attracted attention. Lord Cantelupe was a Cambridge graduate, and it was thought that he might have returned to familiar ground. The police were conducting an intensive search both in the city and the surrounding countryside.

It was in tones of considerable impatience that the Minister spoke to Appleby on the telephone shortly after breakfast. For one thing, there had been some delay in getting him through.

"Look here, Appleby, did that news have to break like that? And how did the papers get on to it?"

"I put it out myself. You don't disapprove?" Over the wire, Appleby's voice sounded flat and tired.

"My dear fellow, you're a pretty sound judge. And it's good that we've got that line on Cambridge. But need *that* have gone out? There may be less virtuously disposed people than ourselves after him, remember."

"There certainly may. But I don't think there's any extra danger in what we've done." Appleby's voice paused. "I think, Minister, you'd better come round and see me."

"I come round and see *you*?" The Minister was startled. "At New Scotland Yard?"

"No, no. I'm in Cantelupe's library. They got you through to me here. I think you'll be – well, interested."

"I'll take your word for that. Give me ten minutes." And the Minister slapped down the receiver.

There were two uniformed inspectors in the book-lined room. The Minister gave them a nod and then turned at once to Appleby. "Well, here I am. What about that fellow Diamond? I'm still uneasy at his being loose. Where is he?"

"Not in this house – where I think he's ceased taking his duties very seriously. I rather hope that he's in Cambridge by this time."

The Minister stared. "You mean that's all rot?"

"Certainly. No more than an attempt at a little diversionary action. We still haven't a notion

about Cantelupe's whereabouts. All we've got is his overcoat."

"And how on earth—"

"On Thursday evening he dined by himself in the very restaurant in which my wife and I saw him entertaining Miss Page. The head waiter thought he looked queer. And when he left he forgot his coat. And in the pocket there was *that*." Appleby picked up from a table beside him a small cigar-box. "Inside which there was this." He opened the box. It contained a broad, flat spool of metal ribbon. "The sequence is clear. Cantelupe received this by post on Tuesday morning. He didn't, here at home, have the machine to play it back on—"

"You mean it's for one of those tape-recorder affairs?"

"Of course it is, Minister. And Cantelupe went out, then and there, and bought one. It was, in fact, the large parcel he was seen bringing into this room. It's standing just behind you."

The Minister swung round. "And the fellow you were telling me about, who sounds as if he was out of Happy Families—"

"Mr Butt the butler? Precisely. But what he heard through the door was not the voice of an actual woman, but the voice of a woman recorded on this." Appleby tapped the cigar-box once more and then handed it to one of his colleagues. "I think, Minister, you'll find what it has to say rather striking."

There was silence for a few moments while the inspector manipulated the machine. Then a girl's voice – low, clear, slightly tremulous but desperately controlled – filled the room. Only the

Minister was hearing it for the first time. Yet within seconds all four men were equally tense and rigid. Two or three times the voice broke off and then began again. Eventually there was a click and it stopped for good.

"So that's it." The Minister had produced a handkerchief and unobtrusively dabbed at his forehead. "Well, no wonder that butler found his employer discomposed. Here was this girl for whom he'd started up an infatuation – kidnapped, treated or at least threatened God knows how, and constrained to make this appeal. I suppose this damned ribbon arrived along with a letter saying just what information Cantelupe must give away if she was to be released. It's as diabolical as anything I ever heard. And we've no notion where she is?"

"Play it again." Appleby spoke grimly to the inspector. "And, just short of two minutes, listen particularly hard."

They listened. "It might be somebody tuning a fiddle," one of the inspectors said. "Two or three strings plucked, quite softly, in rapid succession. But it seems unlikely."

"More probably a technical fault in the machine." The second inspector spoke for the first time. "There's another – a sort of irregular click – a bit later on."

Appleby was gazing sombrely out of the window. But now he swung round quickly. "Play it again," he repeated.

And yet again they listened.

"Find an atlas," Appleby said. "And take that telephone – will you? – and call up the Southern Electricity Board."

Nearly an hour later, as the police car slowed to turn off A40, the Minister broke a long silence. "Cantelupe's a bit older than I thought. He was just tipped into the Kaiser's war."

Appleby nodded. "I know. I looked him up. A very modest martial career. Signals." Appleby took his pipe from his mouth and stared at it, frowning. "We're going to find that girl, if we have any luck. But it occurs to me we may find Cantelupe as well."

"I'll be much obliged to you if we do." Unconvincingly, the Minister reproduced his old jocular form. "What sort of a place is this that you've been mysteriously inspired to make for?"

"Taw? Formless sort of place, I gather. A good many large villas scattered all round a golf course. But the house we're interested in is older – early seventeenth century, and quite a showplace at one time. Taken over by a local authority some years ago and used as offices. Now it's in the hands of a rather vaguely described private firm. I hope we'll make their acquaintance. But first – it's suddenly occurred to me – we should try the hotel. Golfers' place too."

"We may find Cantelupe in the bar, quietly polishing a niblick?"

Appleby was unperturbed by this sarcasm. "I think it's just possible we may hear of him."

And Appleby was right.

For the hotel manager recognised a photograph of Cantelupe at once. "He arrived some days ago," he said. "Odd fellow. Absent-minded. Hasn't even signed our register yet. Irregular that, I'm

afraid. Arrived without any luggage, but seemed to pick things up later. Plenty of money."

"Golfer?" Appleby asked.

"Not remotely interested. And that's another odd thing. We hardly get anything but. It seems to puzzle the chap himself, too. I've sometimes thought he simply wanders about wondering why one earth he came here."

"I see." Appleby's voice betrayed no trace of excitement. "He'll be in to lunch?"

"Sure to be. Or wait – no. Possibly not. He's gone off with some friends – the first people he's spoken to since he came. There was a chap in last night, who seemed to be looking at him rather curiously. And I saw the same fellow go up and speak to him this morning, just beyond the clubhouse. Then three or four other men appeared – rather suddenly, I thought. Golfers, I suppose. They surrounded our queer fish of a guest, and all went off together."

"Did they, indeed? Then I think you can certainly count him out for lunch. Or anything else." Appleby turned to the Minister. "I somehow don't think our friend Diamond will have paid much attention to the little bit about Cambridge. Not after his pals' interesting find here last night."

The Minister nodded. "Well," he said, "we're finding something too. But do you really think they could just walk off with Cantelupe in broad daylight?"

"Yes. In his confused state they could probably get away with it. Come along. I rather feel we haven't a great deal of time."

They drove for only ten minutes, and then the car came to a halt. Appleby jumped out. "A

convenient hill," he said, and handed a pair of binoculars to the Minister. "There's Taw Manor, straight below us. Admirable Jacobean scroll-work. Attracts lovers of architecture from all over the place. As a matter of fact, you can see quite a number of them arriving now."

The Minister focused the glasses, and gave an exclamation. "You mean in that motor-coach moving up the drive?"

"Yes. The South London Architectural and Archaeological Society out on a jaunt. They rang up our interesting friends down there, I understand, and asked if they might just stroll round the place and admire the facade."

"Well, I'm damned!"

"I hope it's others, Minister, who are that. Look - they're getting out." Appleby chuckled. "An entirely male society, you notice. Elderly looking, some of them. And even infirm. But, if they straightened up, I somehow think most of them would be round about six feet. Spreading out, you notice. The fellows wandering round to the back are no doubt attracted by the original Elizabethan stables... Ah!" A shrill whistle had sounded below. And by every available door and window the members of the South London Architectural and Archaeological Society were pouring into Taw Manor. "Chancy," Appleby said. "But if these two were to be got out alive, it needed a dodge like that."

That evening the Minister - he was quite a junior Minister, after all - took Appleby to dine with someone important.

"And the noble and learned professor," the important person said, "-will he be any good again?"

Appleby nodded. "Yes, sir. It's thought that, when Lord Cantelupe realises the girl has come to no final harm through his folly, his condition will clear up and he'll be returnable to his lab."

"In future, he'd better stick to it. *Ne sutor ultra crepidam.* That's Latin for 'Back-room boys should stay put'."

"So it is, sir."

"Diamond?"

"He was the brains of the whole thing. But it was his last ambitious essay in crime. He had gone down early that morning, and was in Taw when we raided it. He tried to escape from an upper window, and broke his neck."

"Excellent. And now would you mind, Sir John, telling our young friend here" - and the important person glanced at the Minister, who passed a nervous hand over his smoothly brushed grey hair - "just how you did it? Was it with mirrors?"

"Only in the initial phase, sir. A mirror entered into that. But the later stage was acoustic, not visual. When one turns on fluorescent, as distinct from ordinary, electric light, one often gets a little sequence of faint musical notes. The microphone the girl was being forced to talk into happened to pick up just that."

"So you knew that much about the place where they were holding her. Did it help much?"

"It wouldn't have, if she wasn't a resourceful girl. They gave her a hand microphone, you see. And she managed, as she held it, to tap out on it, with her nail, *T-A-W* in morse. It came through to us as a faint intermittent click that we almost took for no more than a flaw in the recording. But

it was the chance of getting it through that made Miss Page submit to what was demanded of her."

"She'd better have a medal - and be found an unmarried and eligible employer. Are you married, Sir John?"

"Yes, sir."

"A pity. So all you had to do -"

"Was to find where, in Taw, any fluorescent lighting was in operation. Apart from the hotel and the clubhouse, Taw Manor was the only place. It had been put in when the house was turned over to offices."

There was a short silence. "And Cantelupe?" the important person asked.

"There, of course, is the point of interest in the affair. That Morse message got through to him too. He'd been in the Signals, long ago. But it got through, so to speak, only to his unconscious mind. When he cracked up and lost his memory - as he very soon did - he obeyed the signal he received, and went straight off to Taw. But he had no notion why. He hardly could have - since he had no notion who he was, either. When he was spotted by Diamond's folk last night, they decided that their best course was to collar him. I don't know that it was very sensible. But his disappearance had made hay of their original plan, and I'd say they were rather floundering."

The important person nodded. "You didn't find it catching, Sir John." He paused, having plainly found the phrase upon which the episode should close. "If our young friend will cease detaining the decanter, you and I might venture on a second glass of port."

THE EXILE

Mr Hildebert Braunkopf, proprietor of the Da Vinci Gallery, was in despair. "Three pictures, my goot Sir John Appleby – three most puttikler voonderble pictures stolen in the deeps of the night! Three *chef-d'oeuvre* masterpieces of this very sad great painter Robin Pacello. What losses, Sir John, dogostrophes for the wortl of art."

"No doubt." Appleby glanced round the little exhibition. There were certainly three gaping frames. "I suppose this Robin Pacello is dead? I seem to remember that posthumous exhibitions are your particular line."

Braunkopf nodded – but with the air of one modestly disclaiming some enthusiastic tribute to the beauty of his conduct. "It is the widows, Sir John – the widows and chiltrens and unmarried mummies of these young so sad dead painters. Always I think of them, Sir John, when I arrange these most puttikler reputable well-known memorial exhibittings – yes?"

"Quite so." Appleby had walked up to one of the empty frames. "Unglazed, I see. And the fellow has simply taken a razor and cut the canvas from its stretcher. The others are the same?"

"Just the same. Three precisely similitudinous irreplaceable losses to our voonderble modern art." Mr Braunkopf's deep aesthetic dejection

lightened for a moment. "But at least we have the frames, Sir John – no?"

"You have the frames because, when cut out, the canvases could be rolled and carried away unobtrusively." Appleby took another prowl round the gallery. "Were these the most valuable Pacellos?"

"Valuable, Sir John?" Mr Braunkopf appeared pained by the raw commercialism of this. "All these great Pacellos is non-valuable – absolutely non-valuable and beyond price." Mr Braunkopf paused. "Thirty guineas," he added.

"You were asking thirty guineas for each? This young Pacello has hardly been heard of." Appleby had taken one of the empty frames from the wall. "What would you have accepted?"

"Ten." Mr Braunkopf spoke without hesitation. He seemed to feel that the moment for some professional frankness had come.

"And what would the thief hope to get? Five?"

Mr Braunkopf shook his head. "I don't see the possibles, Sir John, of his getting anything at all."

"That would be my guess, too." Appleby frowned. "And yet you have two or three quite good things in the next room."

"Yes indeeds, Sir John. Kokoschka, Chagall, one small Matisse. And this thief takes three mere nonesenses this young quite dead Pacello." Frankness was growing on Mr Braunkopf. "It does not make sense – yes?"

"No more it does. And the burglary, though not a skilled job, took a good deal of resolution." Appleby had already investigated this aspect of the matter. "Just get down the other two frames,

will you? And then take the stretchers out of all three."

There was very little paint on any of the strips of canvas that had been masked by two of the frames. But with the third it was different. Pacello had for some reason decided a little to contract the area of his picture-space, and he had achieved this by inserting a half-inch slip between frame and canvas. The thief had thus been obliged to leave behind him a narrow rim of paint. A very speculative reconstruction suggested some sort of seascape, and at the bottom a close inspection revealed a fragmentary inscription in dark red pigment:

ogne '54.

The catalogue, when consulted, provided somewhat enigmatic information. The painting had been entitled *The Exile*. Appleby appealed to the Da Vinci's proprietor. But Mr Braunkopf's memory was reprehensibly vague. It was only after some thought that he recalled the exile to have been a woman.

"What sort of woman, Mr Braunkopf? Young or old? And why do you think Pacello was interested in her?"

"Not yunk, Sir John, and not very old neithers. But fenestrated. That was what interested Pacello."

"Fenestrated?" This was clearly a more than common flight of Braunkopf's English.

"Yes, Sir John. Fenestrated and boffled."

"I see." Light had come to Appleby. Pacello's subject had seemed frustrated and baffled. It was a reasonable appearance for an exile to bear. Seeing at least a tenuous line of investigation before him, Appleby departed, leaving Mr Braunkopf in his rifled halls.

Pacello had been a lonely young painter, without interested relatives or intimate friends. Nobody except the ingeniously predatory owner of the Da Vinci – who could in this case scarcely have been solicitous for widow, wife, or unmarried mother – had descended upon his remains. And although the instruments of his art had vanished, probably as being quite as saleable as his canvases, a considerable quantity of junk had simply been pitched into an attic next to the studio in which he had painted.

Appleby worked through this. It was a melancholy task. There was a series of sketch-books, some much thumbed and battered, and some from which pages had been ripped out here and there – perhaps in impatience or despair. Appleby found himself with the impression that Pacello had worked a slender talent very hard, and that nobody had cared a damn. One of the sketch-books Appleby studied with particular attention. It was newer than the others. And pencilled on the cover was the description: *Boulogne, Spring '54.*

The contents were entirely miscellaneous. There were studies of the sea, of clouds, of ingeniously ugly buildings. There were one or two figure studies and several portraits. It was at one of these last that Appleby paused. He was looking at what was far and away the best thing he had yet seen: the head and shoulders of a woman,

with some suggestion of a balustrade upon which she was leaning to gaze out at sea. It was no more than an extremely rapid sketch, and there was no suggestion that the subject had posed, or even been aware of what was happening. Nevertheless what Pacello had achieved was at once something vividly individual and universally moving. At the foot of the page he had scrawled the words *lonely woman*. Then he had struck these out and written *the exile* instead. Appleby looked at this for a long time. Then he put the sketch-book in his pocket and turned to leave. Suddenly he stiffened. The building in which he had located Pacello's studio was at present unoccupied, and he had experienced some difficulty in getting the key. But now somebody was coming cautiously up the attic stairs.

"Good afternoon." Executing an old professional manoeuvre, Appleby stepped from behind the door and smartly closed it. "Did you suppose you were in luck, and the house unlocked? On the contrary, you're out of it. I come from Scotland Yard. The game's up."

This headlong onslaught had its effect. The elderly man who had crept into the attic gave a weak cry. "I don't understand you," he managed to say. "I have simply come to look—"

"I think for this." Appleby drew out the sketch-book. "You got away with the painting, and with two others to obscure what you were about. And then, knowing something of the subject, you realised there would probably be a sketch among Pacello's abandoned effects. So here you are. And here" – and Appleby thrust forward the drawing of the woman – "is...would it be your wife?"

The man nodded. "Yes," he whispered. "It's no good. You've got us."

"Your wife, banished for some reason to Boulogne, was sketched by Pacello without her knowing it. When Pacello died, the painting he made from this sketch was publicly exhibited, bearing the date 1954. And this was the disaster. Why?" Appleby paused. "Have you been conspiring with your wife to suggest that she is dead?" He paused again and received a feeble nod. "An insurance fraud?"

"We've done nothing about that yet!" The elderly man's voice was desperate. "We made it look like drowning – two years ago. But it was held doubtful, and we were scared. It might be another two years before death was legally presumed. She went to Boulogne. It seems to be an eternity ago. And she's still there. But if anybody had recognised that portrait, and noticed the date–"

"You would both have been prosecuted?"

"I suppose so. But – I tell you – I haven't received a penny! I haven't even made a claim on the company! Or only what you might call a provisional notice that–" The elderly man's voice tailed away. He was mumbling incoherently. "Great temptation...sudden idea...wonderful plan...led into it...better self...and didn't work."

"No." Appleby shook his head. "Those wonderful plans seldom do."

ENIGMA JONES

"Hamlet thought it great fun," Appleby said, "to have the engineer hoist with his own petar'. My yarn is about a fellow who was rather, you might say, dropped by it. And it wasn't at all fun. In fact, it was horrible. I'm not sure you'd care to hear it."

Appleby paused on this, while the company – needless to say – expressed itself as willing to take any degree of horror. "Very well," he said, "here goes."

"Can you recall the Great Enigma? He was a stage illusionist of some note, and his real name was Jones. So prosaic a name had very well fitted his father, a highly reputable solicitor who had left his eccentric son a large and equally prosaic house in Kensington. Young Jones – Enigma Jones, you might call him – had this converted into flats, keeping the ground floor and basement for his own use, and letting out the rest. His tenants tended to be theatrical folk like himself; and from time to time, one gathered, their domestic relations would get slightly mixed up. A faithful anthropological study of this little community, that is to say, might not precisely have conduced to edification."

Appleby stopped to puff at his pipe, and I had time to reflect that these rather prim turns of phrase were growing on him.

"Still, the Great Enigma was quite a celebrity, and amusing people were to be met with at his parties. That is probably why a very old barrister friend of mine, Colin Grant, went along to one of them. Grant loves anything odd. On this occasion he got involved with what was decidedly that.

"It was a warm summer night, but late and quite dark, and Grant found an uncomfortably crowded party milling round in a moderate-sized room at the back of the house. He knew a number of stage people, and had expected to see at least some familiar faces. But the guests all proved strangers, and he had to rely entirely upon his host for introductions.

"Jones was quite competent at this, and when he judged Grant to have had enough of one group he disentangled him and led him up to another. The process eventually landed both of them together near a curtained window, and Jones seemed about to shuffle Grant round as before, when he suddenly paused, produced a silk handkerchief, and mopped his forehead. 'A bit warm, don't you think?' he asked Grant.

"It was stifling, so Grant felt he could with perfect civility agree. 'A close night, Jones,' he said. 'Not much air.'

"Jones nodded. 'Yes, indeed,' he said. 'What about drawing back the curtain and opening the window?'

"He had addressed this question not only to Grant but to several people round about, and these broke off their talk to turn to him and in one way or another indicate their agreement. And at that, Jones stepped forward and whisked back the curtain.

"The people standing in the brightly lighted room couldn't distinguish a great deal in the darkness outside. But somewhere close by there was another lit and uncurtained window, and it was the shaft of light from this that enabled Grant, some five seconds later, to see what he did see. It was a human form, hurtling through space."

Appleby was silent for a moment, and I ventured to put in a question. "I think you said this party was on the ground floor?"

"Precisely - and so, naturally, it was only a fraction of a second later that there followed the dull nasty thud."

"Everybody heard that?"

"I hardly suppose so. At that noisy party, only those close to the window would hear anything. Jones seemed staggered for a moment. Then he flung up the window, and he and Grant both peered out. As soon as their heads were in the half-darkness, of course, they could see more. There, sprawling on the flags of a small enclosed yard, was the body of a man. His head was tucked beneath his trunk as no living man's head could be.

"Colin Grant, although elderly, was first through that window. He knelt by the body, and within seconds he knew there was no doubt about the fact of death. He looked upwards. Directly overhead, and right at the top of the house, light was streaming out into the darkness through a window of which the lower sash had been flung up as high as it would go."

"As you can imagine, this distressing business caused a great deal of confusion, and some real distress. There was one lady - it appeared she

lived in the house – who went into a faint after a good deal of screaming. Jones dashed off to fetch a doctor, and somebody had the good sense to ring for the police at once.”

“So that, my dear Appleby,” I asked, “was how you came in?”

Appleby smiled. “Well, answering calls of that sort is no longer precisely my job. But Colin Grant, for a reason of his own, rang me up at home, and I did decide to go straight round.

“When I got there, our people were already on the spot. The dead man, whose name was Fagg, had been a musician, living by himself in a single large room on the top floor. I had a look at his body, where it still lay in the little yard. The place was thoroughly dismal – being little more than a stone-paved oblong space, with a few weeds struggling up between the slabs, some litter slung in a corner, and a couple of basement windows set in gloomy pits, with their tops just peeping dejectedly over the level of rusty iron gratings. It was close to one of these that Fagg’s body was lying. He might have been crawling along – it grotesquely struck me – with some notion of peering through the bars looking for a trapped cat.

“I asked Jones about the character and habits of his tenant: was Fagg known to be in any sort of trouble, and had he a temperament which would lead one to suppose him capable of turning suicidal. But Jones hadn’t much to tell. From the first, he said, he hadn’t cared for the musician, and lately there had even been some coolness between them.

“After a certain amount of poking about here and there, I went up to the dead man’s room,

taking Jones with me. There were two windows side by side, and one of our men from the Yard was making a close study of the one that stood wide open. He had just found some scratches on the paintwork that might well have been made by the shoes of a man climbing out. But, of course, the window I was interested in was the other one."

I looked at Appleby in astonishment. "The other one?" I said - and several of our small company echoed me.

"Precisely. I threw up the sash as far as it would go, and had a good look around. Presently I beckoned Jones and pointed to two small patches of raw putty in the woodwork. He turned as white as a sheet - and then he jumped."

"Jumped?" I was horrified.

"Clean through the window. I made a vain grab at him that took my own head and shoulders out into the open air. I saw his body hit one of these area gratings down below - and vanish."

"Jones had prepared the whole thing?"

"Just that. His quarrel with Fagg - it was over the hysterical lady - had taken him to all lengths. He had knocked his rival on the head and pitched him through the one window shortly before the guests were due to arrive. Then he arranged a prepared dummy - it was no more than a jacket, trousers, and a bag of builder's sand - on a standard magician's device just outside the other window."

"A device?" I was incredulous.

"A retractable bolt, set to operate five seconds after the closing of an electrical circuit. When it slid back, the dummy fell. It was the area grating

down below that had been the real labour. Jones had converted it into a trap swallowing anything that struck it sharply from above. All in all, it was a very pretty illusion."

I shook my head. "I think I could find another word for it. But you said that your friend Grant-?"

"Yes, indeed. He had two reasons for summoning me. He thought Jones had been a suspiciously long time calling in that doctor – and now we know, of course, that he was doing the lightning tidy-up. But there was something before that. It was the drawing back of the curtain that closed that circuit and released the dummy. Grant had seen the Great Enigma make just that gesture on the stage – when demonstrating to his audience that the lady had vanished. The thing had a professional touch that set my friend wondering."

THE HERITAGE PORTRAIT

Lady Appleby came into her husband's study, slipped off her coat, and sat down. "I'll have a drink," she said.

Appleby poured sherry without comment. Judith didn't often take it into her head to drink before dinner. For some seconds they sipped in silence. "Frightfully boring?" he asked.

"No – not boring. Unexpectedly exhausting, though." She paused, frowning at her glass. "I think you ought to have been there."

"Nonsense." Appleby's tone was unnecessarily decisive. Having enjoyed a cosy afternoon with a novel, he was feeling slightly guilty. "For one thing, I just haven't your zest for artistic occasions. For another, I scarcely knew his late lordship, and I've never set eyes on Littlefair, and I'm not a member of the Confectioners' Company, or whatever it is."

"Comfits, not confectionery. The Comfitters. Lord Heritage was their Master. That's why Lady Heritage was presenting them with Littlefair's portrait of her late husband. Or thought she was."

"What's that?" Appleby looked up sharply. Judith wasn't given to idle talk.

"I repeat, John, you ought to have been there. There was – well, I suppose it was a kind of joke. It could be made to sound screamingly funny."

Probably it will be. But it wasn't. It was rather horrible. That's why I'm drinking your sherry."

"Drink some more."

Judith Appleby shook her head. "No. But I'll tell you what happened."

Appleby tossed his novel aside. "Is it a police affair?"

"Lord, yes. That faithful Inspector of yours – the puff-puff man –"

"Chugg?"

"Yes – Chugg. He was on the spot before I came away. So you'll be hearing about it. This is just a preliminary note by an unskilled eye-witness."

Appleby finished his sherry, and with a gesture of mild resolution put the stopper back in the decanter. "Go ahead," he said.

"The Comfitters aren't one of the large livery companies. But they have a splendid hall, and the presentation was to take place in that. The Comfitters themselves, and their wives –" Judith broke off. "How funny! Isn't there a comfit-maker's wife somewhere in Shakespeare?"

"Undoubtedly there is." Appleby replied briskly but not impatiently. "You were saying, I think, that these grand people were up on the dais?"

"Yes – along with Lady Heritage, and Jethro Littlefair, and some particularly important-looking outsiders. The Comfitters have the most gorgeous robes. A sort of cerise –"

"And the body of the hall?"

"It was nearly filled. Goodness knows who they all were, or why they had tagged along."

"Quite so."

"I was in the front row, so I had a lovely view. The portrait was on a large, rather bogus-looking easel behind the big-wigs. It was draped in crimson velvet, and there was an enormous velvet rope and tassel waiting to be pulled. The whole effect was nicely accommodated, I thought, to Jethro Littlefair's later and most Corinthian style. You could see he was as pleased as Punch at the way they were doing him proud. Beaming behind his great woolly beard."

"You mean the blessed thing was to be unveiled?"

"Yes. It's a habit that's spread quite a lot. Lady Heritage, the generous donor, was to pull the tassel. And after a lot of speechifying about the deceased peer's services to the universe at large, she did – good and hard. The crimson stuff came away without a hitch, and people began to clap – which is the thing to do at such moments, it seems. Littlefair looked as if he was wondering whether to rise and make a bow. He needn't have worried. The clapping stopped dead. What was on the easel wasn't Lord Heritage."

"I see." Appleby made no attempt to sound astounded. "But was it a Littlefair?"

"Certainly it was a Littlefair. I knew it quite well – though I was probably the only person there, besides Littlefair himself, who did. It was a big oil which he did ages ago – in fact, when he was still a painter. Really powerful. Mammon."

"*Mammon?*" This time, Appleby was frankly startled.

"Yes. Milton's Mammon, you might say. The least erected Spirit that fell from Heaven. A lot of the Comfitters on the dais couldn't get a proper view, and they were completely bewildered by the cries of protest that came from down below. There was some more or less hysterical laughter as well. Littlefair was the first person to budge – but not in a manner at all to his credit. In fact he lost his head, and bolted from the hall, gibbering."

"And Lady Heritage?"

"She just sat down. It wasn't nice for her."

"It was a damnable outrage."

"Yes." Judith nodded soberly. "A blackguard's joke. And bewildering. I mean that it was funny, and yet it wasn't. I suppose one had violently to repress in oneself a purely wanton glee – and that that's what made it exhausting, as I said. The chief Comfiter – Heritage's successor as Master – did quite well. He looked as if he was just escaping apoplexy. But he got up and said the right things – apologising on behalf of the Honourable Company of Comfitters to Lady Heritage and their other guests. He didn't mention Littlefair, which was natural enough. Then he asked us to remain in our places while he conferred with some of his colleagues. I suppose he had a notion the police might want to question everybody. And your Chugg, as I said, was there in no time. After that, we were told to go away, and vague noises were made about the ceremony taking place on a later occasion. So we went. And all London – or all that sort of London – is gossiping about the thing now."

Appleby nodded. "I bet it is – and thinking up all sorts of explanations. What's yours?"

Judith considered. "It was a demonstration – but against whom or what? It might be against Lord Heritage. Any big financier can be screamed about as the modern Mammon, I suppose. But, equally, it might be a demonstration against Littlefair. His Mammon was good *avant-garde* stuff in its day; and his Heritage is no doubt just another dreary official portrait. Heritage, you see, wasn't a real connoisseur. He was simply another rich man, ministering to his own self-importance by collecting frightfully valuable things. He just wouldn't know that Littlefair had long since ceased to be much good. So the stroke was quite mordant, if conceived as directed against Littlefair himself. Then again, the thing may scarcely have been conceived in terms of personalities at all. There's the silly side of the surrealist movement, just as there was of dadaism and futurism. Doing something spectacularly outrageous on the artistic front, just for its own sake."

"*Un acte gratuit.*" Appleby offered this a trifle vaguely. "What sort of a chap is this Littlefair?"

"Frightfully egocentric and vain. He'll certainly be convinced that he was the sole intended victim of the plot, and the spectacle of his wounded sensibility will be extremely harrowing. But he'll recover."

"Do you think—" Appleby broke off as a telephone bell rang in the room. He walked to his desk, picked up the instrument, and after a few words listened almost in silence. "Thank you, Chugg," he said eventually. "I'll come now." When he had finished the call he turned to his wife. "You were wrong," he said.

"Wrong?"

"Littlefair won't have a chance to recover. He's dead."

Littlefair's house was very much that of a successful man. In fact, everything was on the showy side, and Appleby mounted to a large studio on the top floor by staircases so thickly carpeted that the climb felt more fatiguing than it need be. Inspector Chugg, himself brooding and inactive, was watching subordinates who were busily at work photographing the body. Appleby took his own glance at the dead man. Littlefair was dressed in formal morning clothes, but had emphasised his profession by putting on an enormous bottle-green bow tie. His beard had been so beautifully groomed that it seemed a great shame that it was now soaked in blood. Appleby asked the question that always came to him on such occasions. "Wife and kids?"

"A wife somewhere about London. No children. A mistress – name of Julia Parnaby – downstairs now." Chugg spoke darkly. A career necessarily exposing him to much that was unedifying had never impaired his simple moral feelings. "You wouldn't think a man could live openly like that and carry on a profession at the level he did."

Appleby shook his head. "Highly respectable persons will take a lot from an artist. They regard marital infidelity as authenticating the type... Just what happened here?"

"After the fiasco at the Comfitters, Littlefair seems to have come straight home in a taxi. He burst in upon the Parnaby woman and poured out what had happened. She says he was in a great state – but didn't suggest anything as bad as sheer desperation. Then a fellow called Ozanne

arrived. He was Lord Heritage's brother-in-law, and he had come straight on from Comfitters' Hall. He thought there was just a chance that the real portrait might still be here in this studio. Finding Littlefair still very upset, he tried to calm him down. But his efforts, according to Miss Parnaby, had just the opposite effect. Littlefair kept on saying he was the victim of a vile persecution. And then it seems that something was said about Littlefair's wife – who now, as I've told you, has a separate establishment."

Appleby frowned. "Said by whom?"

"Ozanne wasn't clear. But presently Littlefair was raving against Mrs Littlefair, and saying that she was responsible for the whole thing. Miss Parnaby rather egged him on to this, as one can imagine she would do. Ozanne maintained that this notion was absurd, or at least highly improbable. But that didn't help."

"It wouldn't. When a man's in the state you describe Littlefair as having got into, rational persuasion is more often than not merely exacerbating. This chap Ozanne should simply have cleared out."

Chugg nodded. "He did – quite soon. But not before Littlefair had taken himself up to this studio, declaring that the humiliation was too much for his delicate feelings, and that he just couldn't take it."

"They simply let him go?"

"It seems so. Ozanne stopped on with Miss Parnaby for a few minutes, and appears vaguely to have suggested calling in a doctor. Then he went away, and the lady put in five minutes having a good cry. After that she came up to the

studio, and found Littlefair dead." Chugg paused. "All the appearances of suicide."

"I see." Appleby looked thoughtfully at his subordinate. "And your own mind inclines that way?"

"It's much too soon to incline it one way or the other." Chugg sounded reproachful. "Littlefair was shot through the mouth. The revolver, which lay beside him, has his fingerprints – and in what appears to be quite a plausible position. He was found on his back, which may account for an ugly bruise on his head. But it looks as if the medical people aren't going to be too sure. He may have been stunned first, and then instantaneously shot."

"Access?"

Chugg pointed to the window. "Fire-escape. It drops straight down a blank wall into a deserted yard. Half London could have been involved – and nobody any the wiser."

Appleby inspected the studio thoroughly. It certainly didn't contain the missing portrait of Lord Heritage. On the other hand, there was a good deal of Littlefair's earlier work. It hadn't perhaps, in spite of its merit, ever found a very ready market. Or possibly it was part of the painter's vanity that he had been unwilling to part with some of his best things. And Miss Parnaby, it seemed, vouched for the fact that the "Mammon" had been among these. She had, indeed, seen it in the studio only the week before. Since then, anybody could have slipped up the fire-escape and made off with it. The household appeared to be one entirely negligent in matters of security.

Presently Appleby went downstairs again to interview the lady himself. He was not favourably impressed. Julia Parnaby had unbounded beauty and very sufficient poise. You would have supposed that she was received in the best society every day. But she suggested a hard, calculating and rather empty woman. Appleby felt that he would have had a readier sympathy for a young person more obviously elevated from some humble walk of life. He didn't think she was one who would do anything very staggering at the prompting, say, of sexual jealousy. But she clearly liked luxury and could have made do, very nicely, with absolute opulence. Simple greed might carry her quite a long way.

Appleby went over the ground Chugg had already covered. Miss Parnaby, who seemed to take it as a tribute to her own somewhat equivocal position that she was being questioned by so high an officer of the Metropolitan Police, answered with well-bred calm. Littlefair's death might have been a severe blow to her. But she gave no indication of being knocked out by it.

"I believe, Miss Parnaby, that you think it possible that Mrs Littlefair may have been responsible for the trick with the painting?"

"Nothing seems more likely."

"Why? What sort of woman is she? How would you describe her?"

"Dowdy and queer." The reply came promptly. "She was jealous of Jethro's success after he and I found each other." Julia Parnaby contrived to give to this description of her *liaison* the suggestion of some inescapable decree of fate. "She was just an art student, you know – nothing more."

Appleby refrained from suggesting that Littlefair had presumably once been just that too. "She remained," he asked, "interested in her husband's work, even after the - um - separation?"

"Yes - but only in the vilest way. She maintained that Jethro had ruined himself as a painter; that he had - had prostituted his art." Understandably perhaps, Miss Parnaby had stumbled slightly over this expression. "She has been quite fanatical about it. To listen to her, you'd think she was mad."

"You are on speaking terms with the lady? She hasn't been fanatical about her husband's career in its more personal aspect?"

"She doesn't blame *me*, if that's what you mean. She regards me not as a cause but as a symptom." And Miss Parnaby looked at Appleby with a hard smile, as if taking satisfaction in utterance of this large candour. "She says that a painter who goes soft at the centre - as she declares Jethro to have done - would quite naturally pick up a person like myself. I didn't occasion the rot. I'm just a minor consequence. Her bitterness has been against Jethro, not me. She'd have done anything to make a devastating public commentary on what she regarded as his degeneration. That's why I think it was her at work today."

"But she wouldn't follow it up by murder?"

This time, Miss Parnaby seemed really discomposed. "I don't know what you mean, Sir John."

"I must tell you, then, that it's by no means certain that your - that Mr Littlefair took his own

life. The appearances suggest it. But they may have been contrived."

"She wouldn't have done that. She wouldn't have killed Jethro."

"Hasn't it been said, Miss Parnaby, that hell has no fury like a woman scorned?" Appleby produced this banal quotation – or misquotation – unblushingly.

"He didn't scorn her. She scorned him."

"I see." Appleby wasn't at all sure that this reply met the point. But he was coming to feel that the unpleasing Miss Parnaby owned a certain clarity of mind. He tried one more question. "You weren't struck by anything more about Mr Littlefair before he went up to his studio? There was this agitation, and so forth. But was there anything else?"

"Jethro seemed to be trying to remember something – or to work something out. But only with part of his mind." Miss Parnaby paused, as if feeling that this required better definition. "When you're doing a crossword, and something very urgent and absorbing interrupts you, you may still go on hunting for a clue – without really knowing that you are. You recognise what I mean?"

"Yes, I do." Again Appleby was rather impressed.

"Well, it was like that. Jethro was in this terrible state over what had happened at Comfitters' Hall. In a way, of course, he was putting on a turn about it. All artists are like that."

"Many are."

"And, at the same time, it was quite a genuine brainstorm. But his mind was still groping after something – something that would probably have popped up when Jethro calmed down. Does that make sense?"

Appleby reached for his hat. "At least," he said, "it gives food for thought. Good afternoon."

When Appleby reached the late Lord Heritage's mansion, it was to find Lady Heritage drinking tea in the company of a middle-aged man of military appearance, whom she introduced as her brother, Charles Ozanne. Lady Heritage still seemed dazed by her experience that afternoon, and she received the news of Littlefair's death merely with a helpless gesture and a sigh. But her brother swore softly, and then took a rapid turn across the room as if to compose himself. "I ought to have gone after the fellow," he said as he came back.

"But surely, Charles, that's just what you did do?"

Ozanne glanced at his sister impatiently. "Yes, yes – I went to Littlefair's house, as you know. But I ought to have followed him up to his studio. He didn't look right. In fact, he looked damned wrong. Kind of look I've seen before."

Appleby appeared mildly interested. "In what circumstances, Mr Ozanne?"

"Trenches. Breaking-point. Moments, you know, when it seemed wise to get a subaltern's service revolver away from him. But one gets old. And forgets." Ozanne had a staccato manner of speaking that seemed to be rather conventionally

in accord with his profession. "And my mind was taken up with the bloody picture."

"I don't think you should speak of poor Rupert's portrait in that way." Lady Heritage was reproachful but not angry. "It was very nice, and a great solace to me after my husband's death." She had turned to Appleby. "Rupert died suddenly, you know, only a few days after Mr Littlefair finished his painting. I had it hung in my bedroom at once. And now I wish very much that I hadn't offered it to those shockingly careless Comfitters."

"There certainly appears to have been negligence." Appleby was unobtrusively tactful. "Did you send the canvas directly to the Comfitters' Hall?"

"No, Sir John. It went back to Littlefair, because he wasn't satisfied about the varnish. And he had it delivered yesterday afternoon."

"And some firm that does that sort of queer job carried out the curtaining business this morning." Ozanne offered this information. "After that, the hall was left deserted, and this valuable picture quite unguarded. Incredible - eh? Asking for monkey-tricks. And now Littlefair takes the offensive joke to heart, and blows his brains out. Poor show."

Appleby concurred. "I suppose," he then said to Lady Heritage, "there was nothing about the portrait of your late husband that might be wounding to any individual, or arouse resentment?"

"Certainly not. It was a very nice portrait, very homely and informal, with Rupert in his purple velvet smoking-jacket, smoking a cigar, and with one or two things from his collection around him.

There was a window, too – a wonderfully clever idea, I thought – with several of the Heritage tankers coming up an estuary, and the Heritage refinery in the background. It was all in beautiful taste. And so many pretty colours.”

“You’ll agree, I’m sure, that my sister makes it sound enchanting.” Ozanne’s ironical tone indicated that in artistic matters he owned a sophistication of which Lady Heritage was utterly innocent. “It would have looked well, hung beside some of my brother-in-law’s other things: the Velasquez Infanta, for instance, or the self-portrait of Cézanne.”

Appleby was visibly impressed. “I know that Lord Heritage’s collection was notable. I believe it goes to the nation?”

Ozanne nodded. “With one or two exceptions – yes. This portrait by Littlefair, of course, was my sister’s property, and not involved. We’re having a little trouble over valuation for probate, and so on. That’s why I’ve moved in.”

“Charles is very kindly spending some months with me,” Lady Heritage explained. “Of course the whole collection has been very carefully catalogued as it grew, and we know exactly what Rupert paid for *nearly* everything. But it seems there are all sorts of difficult questions, all the same.”

“I’m sure there are.” Appleby showed a proper sympathy for the burdens that go along with great wealth. “Did the Comfitters ask especially for this particular portrait, Lady Heritage?”

“Oh, no. I don’t think they knew about it. It had never, of course, been exhibited. But they asked for *some* portrait of Rupert – naturally, there have been a great many – to hang in their

beautiful hall. And – as the Master wrote – in a *prominent* position."

"Naturally. And you decided on the Littlefair yourself? Did they then send an expert to look at it?"

"Dear me, no. The Master came to see it himself, along with Lord Godlet who owns the multiple stores, and Sir James Georgano who makes all the wireless sets. Of course they were delighted. Lord Godlet is a great authority. He bought something extremely important only the other day. By one of those Italians whom people admire so much."

"In fact, he bought the Bleistein Leonardo." Ozanne favoured Appleby with a rather wolfish grin. "You could hardly have higher credentials than that."

Appleby nodded. "I've seen that Leonardo. But I wish I'd seen Jethro Littlefair's Lord Heritage."

Ozanne's grin broadened. "I'm afraid," he said, "you never will."

When Appleby got home he found his wife entertaining Mr Hildebert Braunkopf. No doubt the art dealer had been summoned. It was like Judith to guess that the particular sort of information in which he abounded might be required. At the moment she was resisting, without much difficulty, the suggestion that she should buy one of the three Littlefairs which Braunkopf was fortunate enough to have in his gallery. He now turned enthusiastically to his host.

"Three hundred kinnies, my goot Sir John Abbleby, for a puttikler early mature masterpiece this now irreplaceable dead painter."

"My dear fellow, I haven't got the money."

"Or two-seven-five quiet transaction no publicities one-pound notes."

"Look here, Braunkopf – my wife and I are meaning to drop in on you later this week and pick up a drawing or two at a reasonable price. But I certainly don't want to buy anything by Littlefair. All I want is some information about him. He tried to get you to place things from time to time?"

"Certainly, Sir John. That marches without speaking. All the best most established high reputatious artists–"

"Quite so. Did he ever say anything about his commission for Lord Heritage?"

"But yes. It was to be exhibited at Burlington House, he said, and make great sensations in the worlt of art. When Lady Heritage decided to keep it unexhibited, Littlefair was down in the damps."

"In the damps, was he? And when she decided on the presentation to the Comfitters?"

"Littlefair was quite applauded up again."

Not unnaturally, Appleby took a moment to interpret this. "Did you gather there was anything out of the way about the painting?"

Braunkopf nodded. "There was somethings. Perhaps a new formula for composings of an official portrait – yes?"

"I see. Now, there's something else. Did you ever have any dealings with Lord Heritage?"

Mr Braunkopf could be seen to hesitate. No doubt vanity prompted him to declare that he was perpetually transacting business with all the established high reputatious collectors of Europe.

But something in Appleby's eye constrained him to veracity. "Not directly, my goot Sir John. Many the largest most important buyers approach the market only through agents."

"Quite so. And sometimes highly confidential agents? While an important negotiation is going on, it might be difficult to know who was acting for whom?"

"That is so. But most always I know, Sir John. I have big intelligence all that side the great worlt of art."

"I know you have. Could you find out whom Heritage was employing on anything that he wanted treated as more or less top secret?"

Braunkopf made a gesture indicating large confidence. "Two – three hours, Sir John."

"I want the fellow, whoever he is, on that mat." And Appleby pointed to the hearth-rug. "I expect you know enough about almost anybody in the trade, my dear Braunkopf, to make them feel it healthy to pay any little call you suggest."

"But certainly." Braunkopf received this ambiguous testimonial with obvious gratification. "Only that takes larger time – yes?" He considered. "Tomorrow evening – at six."

Appleby sought out Mrs Littlefair next morning, and found her in an unassuming terrace house in a dull suburb. It didn't appear that she had been allowed much share in the prosperity attending her late husband's more recent labours. Perhaps she had been conscientiously opposed to accepting any of the fruits of so debased an art.

"Must I really answer more questions?" Mrs Littlefair, who was handsome in a forbidding way,

looked Appleby straight in the eye. "You know that your men were here yesterday evening, and even obtained my permission to search the house? I'd have thought that was about enough."

"I certainly don't want to attempt anything in the nature of an interrogation. It's rather your opinion that I seek." As he made this pacific speech, Appleby let his glance wander round Mrs Littlefair's environment. It was austere; there was nothing in the room that Hildebert Braunkopf would have judged worth twopence; but there was an impression, nevertheless, of an absolute perfection of taste. It did seem conceivable that the spectacle of her husband accommodating himself to the world of the Heritages might drive this woman to some act of bizarre fanaticism. "I wonder what you think about the woman your husband was living with?"

"I don't. There isn't really a person there to think about. Julia Parnaby has good looks, and nothing else. And one can't *think* about good looks."

"If she felt any reason to suppose that Jethro Littlefair was going to throw her over, do you think she might have done anything drastic?"

"Certainly not. She would simply have sat back and worked out the stiffest terms she could safely demand."

"You would call her mercenary?"

"She'd do a good deal for hard cash."

Appleby smiled. "Unfortunately," he said, "that's true of so many of us."

"It's not true of me."

This had come from the lady like a flash. And Appleby nodded soberly. "I believe that's so. You,

Mrs Littlefair, conduct your life on other principles."

It hadn't, Appleby thought, been a very rewarding little expedition. He was standing in Mrs Littlefair's narrow hall, and preparing to take his leave. But his eye was still active. There was a telephone on a small table, and in addition to the directory there were five or six smaller volumes. One was the handbook of a motoring organisation. "You run a car?" Appleby asked.

Mrs Littlefair appeared surprised. "Yes – a very old one."

"Awkward – isn't it? – a house in a row like this. No garage."

"Yes. But I have the use of a shed in the next road."

"I see. Did those tiresome police who visited you yesterday search that?"

"They did not. They didn't inquire about it."

"Ah." Appleby put a certain grimness into this. "Would you mind walking round there with me now, Mrs Littlefair?"

"Not in the slightest." But Mrs Littlefair's looks – Appleby thought – belied her words. She might have been suddenly frightened. Or she might have just been out of patience and very, very angry.

The shed was a ramshackle affair – decidedly not what is called a private lock-up. But then the car it sheltered was ramshackle too, and nobody could conceivably be prompted to make off with it. There was a pile of sacking and old cardboard

boxes at the back. And it was behind these that Appleby found the portrait.

The canvas had been slashed to ribbons, and bits were missing. But it was unquestionably Jethro Littlefair's ill-starred Lord Heritage. There were the tankers coming up the estuary. One could even distinguish the cigar. When Charles Ozanne declared that Appleby would never see the portrait, he had been wrong.

Mrs Littlefair was very pale. But she remained true to her principles. She touched the ripped surface of the painting, and then drew back in revulsion, as if the very texture was physically intolerable to her. "Horrible," she said, and fainted away.

On the following evening Hildebert Braunkopf arrived punctually with a man called Carabine. He also brought a large portfolio of drawings; and with these he withdrew to seek Judith Appleby as soon as he had handed over the late Lord Heritage's agent to Appleby himself.

Carabine was scarcely a willing guest. But, although sullen and evasive, there was a good deal to which he appeared to realise that he must own up. In forming his collection, he maintained, his employer had relished secrecy and devious courses. Heritage had belonged essentially to big business – the very biggest business – and it had been second nature to him to enjoy discomfiting a rival by coming out suddenly with this or that *fait accompli*. And of course the world of art dealing had its own peculiar standards and conventions. Some of them might look a bit queer to an outsider. But he, Carabine, had

certainly done nothing that wasn't quite the proper thing.

"I suppose," Appleby asked, "that you fixed up the commission with Littlefair?"

"Yes."

"That was just one of the jobs for which you received a regular salary from Lord Heritage?"

"Of course I had a salary."

"Nevertheless, you no doubt got Littlefair the job on the condition that he let you have 20% of it back as a rake-off?"

"Only 15%. That's very usual and moderate."

"Perhaps it is, Mr Carabine. But did Lord Heritage know?"

"I can't tell you. No – I suppose he didn't."

"I understand that Mr Ozanne, Lady Heritage's brother, has taken charge of this side of Lord Heritage's affairs. What would have happened if Littlefair had for any reason felt prompted to speak up about that rake-off? Mr Ozanne would probably have investigated some other of your dealings for his late brother-in-law?"

Carabine moistened his lips nervously.
"Perhaps."

"And Lord Heritage's fondness for secrecy and so forth gave you a good deal of scope – shall we say to advance your own monetary interests in ways unknown to him. It is very much in your interest that there should be no inquiry?"

"Naturally one doesn't want a lot of fuss."

"Moreover it would be your impulse to keep mum, if you came upon funny business by

anybody else, since one exposure might lead to another?"

Carabine took a moment to consider this. "You put it all deuced unfairly," he said.

"Never mind how I put it. Just reflect that Littlefair is dead – and that the police are by no means satisfied as to how he died. That, Mr Carabine, takes this affair quite outside your comfortable territory as a common-or-garden shady person. That being so, I wonder if you have anything more to say?"

Reluctantly, Carabine admitted that he had.

It was half an hour later that Appleby rejoined his wife. Rather to his surprise, she was alone. "Hullo," he said, "what's happened to Braunkopf? Has he sold you the whole lot?"

Judith shook her head. "He's gone after higher game. Lady Heritage."

"She doesn't know the top of a painting from the bottom. And she'll certainly be tired of the whole subject at the moment. I don't know why she should agree to see him."

"Braunkopf is very enterprising. He's made an appointment with her. He had a sort of lever."

"A lever?"

"This job he's just done for you: digging out Carabine's association with her husband."

Appleby jumped to his feet. "Braunkopf's told her I've got on to that?" He strode across the room to the telephone.

"My dear John, what's the matter?"

"Action stations, Judith. Get out the car."

Inspector Chugg was waiting on Westminster Bridge. He jumped in before Appleby had drawn to a halt. "A Mercedes," he said. "And it has an hour's start for the coast. We've got everything out, sir. But it's always tricky at night. A driver who knows the country really well might just get through."

"Get through to where, Inspector?" Judith, who was sitting beside her husband in front, turned round. "Can't you have something uncomfortable waiting at the other end?"

"The other end is a motor-cruiser, your ladyship. But we don't know just where she's lying. The difficulty's there." Chugg paused, fiddling with a mechanism beside him. "Your short-wave's all correct, sir."

Judith said no more. Even the fact that this was John's private car hardly made her presence very regular. They swept through south London in the early darkness and out along one of the arterial roads. Voices murmured in the back as messages came in from all over the southern counties. Judith got the impression that two or three times the Mercedes had been spotted, but on no occasion by police who were in a position to give immediate chase. Once they halted for a rapid consultation over a map. When they went on, it was as if John had taken some confident guess. She remembered that he had got to know the south coast pretty well during the war. She knew that he and Chugg were directing and co-ordinating a vast search. Suddenly it came to her that perhaps they were going to do something more. Perhaps they were themselves going to be in at the death - if it came to a death. A long time seemed to pass. Judith dozed, and woke up. She saw they had reached the sea - or rather

they had reached a cliff road, high above it. There was an alarming moment when their headlights appeared to reveal nothing but an abyss before them. Then they swung abruptly to the right, and Judith realised that they were rounding a deep cove. At the next bend the windscreen took a sudden dangerous lunge at her face. John had brought the car to a dead stop. There was another car – stationary and without lights – straight in front of them. Chugg gave a shout – it might have been of excitement or of recognition – and in a moment the two men were out and running. Judith followed.

And then it all happened in seconds – or so it seemed to her afterwards. There was dark water far below, and from somewhere out on its invisible surface the brief flash of a signal. There was a crazy path down the face of the cliff, and there was a figure running yet more crazily down it, caught every now and then in the beam of Chugg's powerful torch. The figure was staggering under some obscure but crippling burden, and the two pursuers gained rapidly as Judith watched. Chugg was shouting – a summons, a warning – when his voice was drowned by a single ghastly scream. The fugitive had slipped, recovered, slipped again, dropped the burden in a final effort to regain balance, and then plunged headlong down the face of the cliff.

They drove back to London in the very early morning. Judith felt numb. "A better death than being hanged," she said – and then tapped the stout wooden box beside her. "John – what is it, anyway?"

"It's the Grandoni Apollo."

"Impossible!"

"One of the finest Greek bronze heads ever discovered. And, as you know, it disappeared again about a couple of centuries ago. There have been plenty of copies and engravings to tell one what it was like. But the head itself had vanished – until Carabine found it and bought it on the quiet for Heritage. Then Heritage hit on the notion of the portrait. Cigar, tankers, refinery, an Old Master or two – *and* the Grandoni Apollo. Think of the sensation when the thing was recognised at the Royal Academy exhibition. But Heritage died. And Lady Heritage, having no notion of what was afoot, simply shoved the portrait into her bedroom. And there it was presently seen by her brother Charles Ozanne, who had some artistic cultivation. He tumbled to the truth, rummaged round, and found the actual Apollo."

"If he hadn't, he'd be alive today." Judith shivered.

"Quite so. Well, there was a vast temptation to steal the bronze. Because of Heritage's close ways, there was a chance that his estate could be wound up without this big purchase ever coming to light – and particularly, of course, if Ozanne himself moved in and negotiated the tricky corners. He decided to take the risk. And all went well – until his sister decided to give the portrait to the Comfitters. Immediately it was unveiled, and glimpsed by a competent art historian, Ozanne was done for. And Littlefair was another risk. He mayn't have been more than vaguely aware of the importance of the Apollo. But if the portrait simply vanished unaccountably, he might begin groping for a reason – and find it. Actually,

as we know, he very nearly got there in the last fifteen minutes of his life."

"So the Mammon-business *wasn't* any sort of demonstration."

"It was designed by Ozanne to look like one – and so to obscure the practical motive involved. It was also neatly calculated to throw Littlefair into a state of mind – later cleverly exacerbated by Ozanne – in which suicide would seem plausible. Ozanne was a little quick to plug the suicide theory, I noticed."

"And he tried to plant the thing, very much as a demonstration, on Littlefair's wife?"

"Exactly. And by slashing the canvas to ribbons before planting it in her shed, he was able to remove the vital area with the Apollo. The only remaining danger was Carabine. But it was entirely in Carabine's interest to remain quiet, and Ozanne had no reason to suppose that we should ever hear of him. But when Braunkopf went off and prattled to Lady Heritage, she naturally passed on his talk to her brother. The game was up, and Ozanne made his last move – the move that ended on that nasty bit of cliff."

MURDER ON THE 7.16

Appleby looked at the railway carriage for a moment in silence. "You couldn't call it rolling-stock," he said.

This was true. The carriage stood not on wheels but on trestles. And it had other peculiarities. On the far side of the corridor all was in order; sliding doors, plenty of plate glass, and compartments with what appeared to be comfortably upholstered seats. But the corridor itself was simply a broad platform ending in air. Mechanically propelled contrivances could manoeuvre on it easily. That, of course, was the idea.

Appleby swung himself up and peered through one of the compartments at what lay beyond. He saw nothing but a large white concave surface. "Monotonous view," he murmured. "Not for lovers of the picturesque."

The Producer laughed shortly. "You should see it when we're shooting the damned thing. The diorama, you know. Project whole landscapes on that, we do. They hurtle past. And rock gently. It's terrific." Realising that his enthusiasm was unseemly, he checked himself and frowned. "Well, you'd better view the body. Several of your people on the job already, I may say."

Appleby nodded, and moved along the hypertrophied corridor. "What are you filming?" he asked.

"It's a thriller. I've no use for trains, if they're not in a thriller – or for thrillers, if there isn't a train." The Producer didn't pause on this generalisation. "Just cast your mind back a bit, Sir John. Cast it back to September, 1955."

Appleby considered. "The tail end of a hot, dry summer."

"Quite so. But there was something else. Do you remember one of the evening papers running a series of short mystery stories, each called 'Murder on the 7.16'?"

"Yes. Oddly enough, I think I do."

"We're filming one of them."

"In fact, this *is* the 7.16?" Appleby, although accustomed to bizarre occasions, was looking at the Producer in some astonishment. "And perhaps you're going to tell me that the murdered man is the fellow who wrote the story?"

"Good lord, no!" The Producer was rather shocked. "You don't imagine, Sir John, we'd insist on having you along to investigate the death of anyone like that. This corpse is important. Or was important, I suppose I should say. Our ace director. Lemuel Whale."

"Fellow who does those utterly mad and freakish affairs?"

"That's him. Marvellous hand at putting across his own crazy vision of things. Brilliant – quite brilliant."

It seemed that Whale was in the habit of letting himself into the studios at all hours, and wandering round the sets. He got his inspiration

that way. Or he got part of it that way and part of it from a flask of brandy. If he was feeling sociable, and the brandy was holding out, he would pay a visit to Ferrett, the night-watchman, before he left. They would have a drink together, and then Whale would clear out in his car.

This time Ferrett hadn't seen Whale – or not alive. That, at least, was his story. He had been aware that Whale was about, because quite early on this winter night he had seen lights going on here and there. But he hadn't received a visit. And when there was still a light on in this studio at 4 a.m. he went to turn it off. He supposed Whale had just forgotten about it. Everything seemed quite in order – but nevertheless something had prompted him to climb up and take a look at the 7.16. He liked trains, anyway. Had done ever since he was a kid. Whale was in the end compartment, quite dead. He had been bludgeoned.

Ferrett's was an unsupported story – and at the best it must be said that he took his duties lightly. He might have to be questioned very closely. But at present Appleby wanted to ask him only one thing. "Just what was it that made you climb up and look through this so-called 7.16?"

For a moment the man was silent. He looked stupid but not uneasy. "I tell you, I always liked them. The sound of them. The smell of them. Excited me ever since I was a nipper."

"But you've seen this affair in the studio often enough, haven't you? And, after all, it's *not* a train. There wasn't any sound or smell here?"

"There weren't no sound. But there was the smell, all right."

"Rubbish, Ferrett. If there was any smell, it was of Whale's cursed brandy." It was the Producer who broke in. "This place makes talkies – not feelies or tasties or smellies. *This* train just doesn't smell of train. And it never did."

Appleby shook his head. "As a matter of fact, you're wrong. I've got a very keen nose, as it happens. And that compartment – the one in which Whale died – does, very faintly, smell of trains. I'm going to have another look." And Appleby returned to the compartment from which Whale's body had just been removed. When he reappeared he was frowning. "At first one notices only the oceans of blood. Anything nasty happening to a scalp does that. But there's something else. That split-new upholstery on one side is slightly soiled. What it suggests to me is somebody in an oily boiler-suit."

The Producer was impatient. "Nobody like that comes here. It just doesn't make sense."

"Unsolved mysteries seldom do." Appleby turned back to Ferrett. "What lights were on when you came in here?"

"Only the line of lights in the 7.16 itself, sir. Not bright, they weren't. But enough for me to–"

Ferrett was interrupted by a shout from the centre of the studio. A man in shirtsleeves was hurrying forward, gesticulating wrathfully. The Producer turned on him. "What the devil is wrong with you?"

"It's not merely Whale's flaming head that's suffering in this affair. It's my projector too. Somebody's taken a bleeding hammer to it. I call that beyond a joke."

Appleby nodded gravely. "This whole affair went beyond a joke, I agree. But I've a notion it certainly began in one."

There was a moment's perplexed silence, and then another newcomer presented himself in the form of a uniformed sergeant of police. He walked straight up to Appleby. "A fellow called Slack," he murmured. "Railway linesman. Turned up at the local station in a great state. Says he reckons he did something pretty bad somewhere round about here last night."

Appleby nodded sombrely. "I'm afraid, poor devil, he's right."

"You didn't know," Appleby asked next day, "that there's a real 7.16 p.m. from your nearest railway station?"

The Producer shook his head. "Never travel on trains."

"Well, there is. And Slack was straying along the road, muttering that he'd missed it, when Whale stopped his car and picked him up. Whale was already a bit tight, and he supposed that Slack was very tight indeed. Actually Slack has queer fits – loses his memory, wanders off, and so on – and this was one of them. That was why he was still in his oil-soaked work-clothes, and still carrying the long-handled hammer-affair he goes about tapping things with. There just wasn't any liquor in Slack at all. But Whale, in his own fuddled state, had no notion of what he was dealing with. And so he thought up his funny joke."

"He always was a damned freakish fool over such things." The Producer spoke energetically. "A

funny joke with *our* 7.16?"

"Precisely. It was the coincidence that put it in his head. He promised Slack to get him to his train at the next station. And then he drove him here. It was already dark, of course, and he found it enormous fun kidding this drunk – as he still thought him – that they were making it by the skin of their teeth. That sort of thing. No doubt there was a certain professional vanity involved. When he'd got Slack into that compartment, and turned on your gadget for setting scenery hurtling by, it was too amusing for words. Then he overreached himself."

"How do you mean?"

"If the doctors who've seen Slack have got it straight, it was like this. Whale suddenly took on the part of a homicidal maniac. His idea was to make Slack jump from what Slack believed to be a fast-moving train. Only Slack didn't jump. He struck." Appleby paused. "And you can imagine him afterwards – wandering in utter bewilderment and panic through this fantastic place. He had another fit of destruction – I suppose your diorama-gadget makes a noise that attracted him – and then he found a way out. He came to his senses – or part of them – early yesterday, and went straight to the police."

The Producer had brought out a handkerchief and was mopping his forehead. "Slack won't be-?"

"No, no. Nothing like that. His story must be true, because he couldn't conceivably have invented it."

"A plea of insanity?"

Appleby shook his head. "You don't need to plead insanity if you defend yourself against a chap you have every reason to suppose insane. Whale's will be death by misadventure."

The Producer drew a deep breath. "A ghastly business. But I'm glad it wasn't a real murder."

Appleby smiled. "That's only appropriate, I suppose. It wasn't a real train."

A VERY ODD CASE

"Jewellery?" Appleby said. "It's certainly queer stuff and causes endless trouble. Lady Scattergood's emeralds, for instance - I've told you about them. A strange affair, decidedly. But nothing to Mrs Denton and her diamonds."

"Have you a memento of that in your museum too?" I asked.

"I'm glad to say I have - and I'll show it to you presently." Appleby paused meditatively. "Yes - a very odd case indeed. And, you know, she seemed a decent sort of woman enough. But asking for trouble - just asking for it."

"Mrs Denton?" Recollection came to me. "Did you say *decent*?"

"Well, well - the word can be applied in various ways." Appleby was wisely tolerant. "Put it that she seemed not a bad sort. But of course she had enjoyed that rather startling career, and everybody knew of the way in which her enormous wealth had come to her. It made the thing additionally awkward. For a time her situation really did look quite black. And principally - this was the queer part - because of the obstinate way in which she clung to a thoroughly damaging story. The visit of Busson, for instance, on the very morning she left Paris."

I shook my head. "My dear Appleby, you talk in riddles. Be a good fellow and settle down to solid

narrative."

"Then here goes." And Appleby considered for a moment. "I may begin by mentioning certain of the ways in which the good lady was, as I've said, asking for trouble. The diamonds constituted an elaborate rig-out - what the trade, I believe, calls a parure - and their value was very high. Mrs Denton made no secret of the fact that she always took them about with her. Moreover, just as if she was positively anxious to advertise the fact, she had lately had a new travelling-case made for them - an obtrusive and expensive-looking pigskin affair which she would carry like a large handbag. That alone was asking for pretty well anything - murder not barred.

"Then again, Mrs Denton quite often went abroad - and on these occasions, too, the diamonds went with her. There was trouble in that - although only of an official, humdrum kind. Exchange restrictions, you know, have meant that valuable things of that sort have to be checked in and out of the country at the Customs barriers. Otherwise, there would always be some wealthy people prepared to buy jewellery in England, take it abroad, sell it, and have a nice expensive time on the proceeds before returning home. So Mrs Denton had to show up her diamonds whenever she came and went."

"Did she move," I asked, "in good society?"

"My dear fellow, that is something of which we all have our own definition. Many of her acquaintances had titles and estates and it is conceivable that a few even had ancestors. But Mrs Denton was not exactly a snob. She stuck by some old friends - or had some old friends stick to her. Did you ever hear of the Grand Fatout?"

"I think not."

"You scarcely surprise me. He was a rather low-class conjurer in Marseilles with whom Mrs Denton's passionate interest in human nature – particular masculine human nature – had prompted her to brief but warm friendship. When Fatout hanged himself – he couldn't quite stand the pace – Mrs Denton took on his destitute widow as her maid. It must be called a charitable act."

"No doubt. But surely, Appleby, eccentricity of that sort –"

"Quite so. Mrs Denton was very vulnerable to the world's censure once any spotlight fell on her."

Again Appleby paused as if to marshal his facts. "Behold, then, Mrs Denton, attended by the relict of her deceased illusionist, presenting herself before the Customs officials at Dover on her return from a trip to Paris.

"They knew her very well. And, as a necessary consequence of that, they knew the diamonds very well, too. All too well, as it turned out. For when Mrs Denton opened that opulent pigskin receptacle and displayed her treasure, the fellow whose duty it was to check them off against some document found himself obscurely puzzled. He missed, I suppose, in some minute but just perceptible degree, the usual knock-you-down effect."

"I believe, I've got it!" I could hardly restrain my triumph. "What he saw was not the true diamonds at all, but mere paste."

"How acute you are. But, of course, this wasn't what Mrs Denton was taxed with there and then.

There were delays, consultations and so forth; and she was questioned so closely that she was reduced to tears. And she clung to what, as I have already said, was a most damaging story – although she appeared too confused herself to see it as that.

"She had lately met a certain M. Busson, a man of high character, who was one of the foremost authorities on precious stones in France. He had called on her at her hotel in Paris that very morning, inspected the diamonds, and seen Mrs Denton lock them away for their journey. Since then, she declared, the case has never been out of her sight, nor its key out of her pocket."

"And how did it end?"

"It ended – for the moment – with the questionable gems being impounded for further examination; and with Mrs Denton departing by a late, slow train for London. She put on quite an act – staggering out, weeping into a few square centimetres of scented handkerchief, and with her maid – whose name was Annette – following behind with the luggage, including the despoiled and forlorn jewel-case."

"And then there were legal proceedings?"

Appleby shook his head. "No – there was only the threat of them. The official world is very cautious, and making out a criminal case against Mrs Denton would be tricky. But it was concluded that she had certainly disposed of her diamonds in order to build up a little fund abroad. Recovering them was decidedly up to her. She was smoothly informed that no doubt she had fallen into some species of error – and that the true diamonds must be produced for inspection."

"And how, Appleby, did you come into this?"

"A week later Mrs Denton appeared at the Yard – and with a queer tale. She had received an anonymous letter offering to restore the diamonds to her – but at their full market value. There were precise instructions about how to proceed. It struck me that, if her story was true, she had shown considerable strength of mind in resisting the proposal. So I took up the affair myself. It didn't really take much solving.

"As you know, it is difficult to dispose of stolen jewels for anything like their true value. So here was an ingenious combination of theft and blackmail. Mrs Denton's diamonds had been stolen – and she herself had been manoeuvred into what looked like a criminal deception. She *had* to have her jewels back, poor woman, or go to jail. It pretty well came to that."

"How was it done? Come and see." And Appleby led the way down the room to his little collection of criminological exhibits. "When Mrs Denton had that new jewel-case made, Annette went to some of her deceased husband's old associates in the conjuring business and had a simple trick replica manufactured. Here it is."

I stared in astonishment at the handsome affair held out to me. "You mean to say—"

"Certainly. It is perfectly simple, and does a neat little swallowing trick. Put in X. Shut the case. Open it again. What you find is Y – while X is snugly tucked away in a false lid. It never occurred to the Customs people to be interested in the mere receptacle. Their attention was given to what they had opened it on. So when they had impounded the false diamonds and the bewildered Mrs Denton had shoved this

seemingly empty case at Annette as worthless, the real diamonds were in fact concealed in it still, and Annette was able to possess herself of them at leisure. One can forgive her the pleasure she must have taken in the fraud. Her husband, you remember—”

“Quite so.” I stopped Appleby before he could recur to what struck me as the least edifying aspect of the whole affair. “And what a queer story.” I took the pigskin exhibit rather cautiously in my hands. “I can—?”

“Play with it, my dear fellow? Certainly. You’ll find it — as I said at the start — a very odd case indeed.”

THE FOUR SEASONS

The Archdeacon had told us a ghost story, and as the polite murmurs of interest and appreciation died away our hostess threw a log in the fire. It was quite a small log, but nevertheless the action committed us to a further sleepy, even if very tolerably comfortable, half-hour. And this prompted one of the younger people to a question the precise phrasing of which was perhaps a shade lacking in tact. "And now," she asked, "couldn't we have a really exciting one?"

"A mystery story," another girl said. "A murder in a sealed room, and then some frightfully cunning detection, and all ending up in a terribly thrilling chase."

"That is just what Sir John could give us." Our hostess turned to Appleby. "You wouldn't be so unkind as to refuse?"

For a moment the Assistant Commissioner was silent, so that I wondered whether he was going to contrive some polite excuse. A long career at Scotland Yard had provided him with plenty of horrific material, and there had been occasions on which I had known him come out with it forthrightly enough. But he had old-fashioned ideas on what was suitable for mixed company. So I wasn't very surprised by his words when he presently did speak.

"Do you know, I'm afraid that positively nothing in the murderous way comes into my

head? But an affair that had its moment of mystery – well, I think I can manage that."

"Only a moment of it?" The girl who had required excitement was reproachful.

Appleby shook his head. "Oh – what I shall tell you was abundantly mysterious. But mystery, you know, is another matter. One is lucky ever to get a glimpse of it." Appleby paused, and it was plain that he spoke seriously. Then he told us his tale.

"John and Elizabeth Fray were old friends of my wife's family, and for some years we used to spend a week with them just before Christmas. The party would be rather like this one, and the house was similar, too – which is no doubt what has put the incident I am going to describe into my mind. Fray Manor rambled in an easy, unassuming fashion over a good deal of ground and back through several centuries. The oldest bit was undoubtedly at the top. You may judge that to be a good mysterious touch at the start, although I hasten to add that it has no particular relevance for my story.

"Well then, there, at the top of the house, was a fine late Elizabethan Long Gallery, with a magnificent view through high, grey-mullioned windows. Not your sort of view, though. Fray is in the Fen Country; and the house looks out over level fields stretching to the horizon, with here and there a canal or windmill or church tower, and everywhere an enormous sky.

"But there was another particular in which the set-up at Fray isn't to be compared with this." And here Appleby turned to our hostess with a smile. "Neither John nor Elizabeth had the sort of grasp you and Hugh possess of family history –

and particularly of family possessions. I don't mean that they were indifferent to John's inheritance – far from it. But they were vague, and I think felt that through all past and all future time Fray had been and would be the same. In point of fact, there were ominous signs that they were mistaken, and the family fortunes were altogether shakier than they understood.

"I used to doubt whether their small son, Robin, would much mend matters. For Robin too was vague – although in what might be called a potentially more distinguished way. He was a shy child, but with some hidden flame in him – of passion, of imagination: one couldn't tell what. Certainly he was more likely to add something to the ideal than to the practical world. I'm afraid that I can't describe him better than that – which is a pity, since my story turns on him."

"Robin Fray is its hero?" The Archdeacon asked this.

And Appleby nodded. "Yes. Not, I'm glad to say, the tragic hero. Although in a sense, it was a near thing."

"I don't need to tell you much about the house-party. It wasn't large, and we nearly all were friends of long standing. But there were three exceptions. Miss Shibley was an elderly woman who painted dogs, and John Fray's admiration for this accomplishment was so great that he had made Elizabeth invite her to stop, pretty well out of the blue. Then there was a fellow called Habgood, who appeared to do free-lance articles on country houses for the magazines. Finally, and in rather a different category, there was an American cousin, Charles Fray."

"The actual cousinship must have been extremely remote, since the American branch of the family had been established in New England for many generations. But I was amused to notice that Charles knew far more about the family history than John did. Not that Charles obtruded his knowledge. He was an observant, rather diffident bachelor. It was with some surprise that I gathered he was a highly successful business executive and extremely wealthy. He was due to conclude his visit a couple of days after my own arrival. I was sorry about this, because he seemed to me a thoroughly nice fellow.

"I've mentioned the Long Gallery. We had tea there on the last afternoon of Charles Fray's stay, and it happened that he and I made a little tour of inspection of the paintings lining one side of the place. There were a great many of them, although if Frays had ever had luck on their continental wanderings, and brought home a Titian or a Rubens, it had long since gone to the sale room. But there is often a mild charm in a collection of mediocre pictures that have accreted over some centuries in that sort of house, and my American acquaintance was clearly delighted with this record of his English relatives' artistic tastes.

"There was one painting in particular that he paused before. For some moments I couldn't see why. It was a small autumnal landscape with figures, executed in the Flemish taste of the late sixteenth century, which would have been pleasing enough if the quality of the painting hadn't been rather notably poor. What was represented was a bleak, level scene, with a windmill in the middle distance and the towers of

a tiny town closing the horizon. In the foreground was the gable of a house, with an attic window out of which a small boy was gazing rather disconsolately at the prospect. I had just taken this in when Charles Fray touched my arm and pointed across the Gallery. I saw his point. There, through the large Tudor window, was an actual landscape very like the painted one we had been glancing at. It was possible to guess at once what had prompted some bygone Fray to make this particular purchase. But that, at the moment, wasn't all. At the real window our small friend Robin was himself gazing wistfully out over the bare fields. He and the boy in the picture, one could feel, were both longing for a gorgeous fall of snow."

Appleby paused on this. The Archdeacon, whose successfully accomplished ghost story gave him the status of a performer who had retired into the wings, judged it proper to offer a word of encouragement. "A pleasing incident," he said. "It makes a picture in itself."

"No doubt. But it was then handled a shade heavily - chiefly by Miss Shibley, the woman who painted dogs. She came up at that moment, and I pointed out the correspondence that had attracted us. She brought it into general notice, and even teased Robin a little. She asked him if he knew the painting was a magic painting, and that it would never, never snow again outside until it had snowed in the painting first. It would have been difficult to tell what Robin made of this. I thought Charles Fray looked a little startled, and that at the same time he was watching the child curiously. Then he turned the conversation by asking John whether he knew anything about the origin of the Flemish painting.

"But John, of course, was as vague as usual. He had once been told some story about it, which had entirely gone out of his head. He did remember that when his father died there had been some reason for having it specially looked at by the fellow who came down and valued everything. It hadn't proved to be worth much.

"Habgood, the guest who went round writing up country houses, took a hand at this point. That is to say, he peered at the painting with a good deal of curiosity, and then rather baldly remarked that its owner was certainly right, and that it was artistically worthless. I believe John Fray was slightly nettled; probably he liked the thing just because it had a smack of his own familiar landscape; and the incident was closed by some other guest having the good sense to cause a diversion.

"The next morning Charles Fray took his departure. I remember him looking up at the sky as he prepared to step into his car, and saying – in rather a whimsical tone – something about snow coming soon. It was true that that great sky appeared heavy with it. But certainly not a flake had fallen.

"And now I come to the sudden crisis of the affair. What remained of the party was gathered in the drawing-room shortly after lunch when Robin burst in upon us like a small madman. 'It's come!' he shouted. 'It's come, it's come, it's come!' His eyes were blazing, and as he stared at us it happened that for a second I met his gaze directly. You remember my saying that there was a moment not simply of the mysterious, but of mystery, in the business? Well, this was it. The boy had met a mystery. He had met the real thing. And he was exalted.

"But now his mother was pulling him up – gently enough, but decidedly. 'Robin dear, don't be so noisy. And what has come?'

"The snow. It's come, I tell you!"

"I think we all turned and looked through the window. The sky was more leaden than ever – but still no snow was falling. And suddenly the boy laughed – quite wildly. 'Sillies!' he shouted. 'Dear old sillies! Not outside. In the picture. Don't you remember? It *has* to be in the picture – *first*.'

"There was an awkward silence. Some of us, I imagine, supposed the child to be delirious, and the more obtuse may have concluded that it was all some sort of impertinent joke. I could see Robin's parents exchange an alarmed glance. They were simple souls, remember, and probably regarded their boy as being at best quite dangerously dreamy and fanciful.

"Habgood was the first person to produce what looked like a sensible reaction. 'I suppose,' he said, 'that somebody may have been perpetrating a trick up there? I'll go and see.' And then he turned to Robin. 'There's often a good deal of magic in pictures, you know. But it doesn't always last.' He gave the boy a kindly pat on the shoulder, and left the room.

"For some seconds we were all silent. And then somebody gave a little involuntary exclamation, and pointed to the window. The first flakes were coming down."

Our hostess gave a deft kick at her small log, and flame flickered up around it. "I hope," she said, "there was magic in the picture."

Appleby nodded. "I was hoping so, too. And I was in possession, you know, of an important

piece of evidence."

"Evidence?"

"Just that single glance of the boy's. To a policeman, a wink - or call it the absolute absence of one - ought to be as good as a nod, any day. Somehow it suddenly struck us that we'd all better follow Habgood up to the Long Gallery. I said so, pretty vigorously - and then led the way, with Robin's hand in mine.

"As we mounted the final flight of stairs, Habgood came down to meet us. He glanced at the boy, and for a moment he just didn't appear to know what to say. It was uncomfortable, as you may guess. And then he found what wasn't a bad tone - light, but not in the least condescending or facetious. 'It's gone. Robin. It's gone, as it came. It's true, isn't it, that all snow doesn't lie?'

"The boy said nothing, but I felt his hand tremble, and I saw that he had gone very pale. Suddenly he gave a tug; I let him go; and he ran to the far end of the Gallery where the picture hung. By the time he got to the end of that long vista he looked quite comically - or tragically - small.

"When we came up with him he was very still, gazing at the familiar, the mediocre, the untransformed autumnal painting - hanging as it had always hung on the known, predictable wall. He seemed to have no disposition to cry, and for a moment nobody had anything to say. Then some worthy woman began talking nervously to Elizabeth Fray about tricks of light, and what a charming fancy of Robin's it had been. Outside, the snow was still falling.

"I looked at the little painting, and suddenly I was quite sure that there should indeed be snow there too. This wasn't entirely intuition. I had, in fact, been doing my best to think. And now I asked John Fray to close the doors at either end of the Gallery, and to let nobody out. Then I searched the place – pretty grimly, for I had a notion that, so far as the boy's confidence in this universe was concerned, rather a lot depended on it. Of course there hadn't been time to find a really cunning hiding-place. Within half an hour, Robin had his snow-scene in his hands."

The girl who had wanted a sealed room and a thrilling chase cried out delightedly at this.
"Really and truly?"

Appleby smiled at her.

"Really and truly. There it was: the same landscape, the same attic window, the same small boy. But everywhere, snow. And such snow! Teniers couldn't have done it. Nor could he have done the figures with which the small landscape was peopled. Against that snow their life was miraculous. What Robin Fray held was, in its minor way, a masterpiece. Which is what, from the elder Breughel, you might expect."

Appleby had paused.

"Explanations? Well, not many are needed. What had prompted Miss Shibley to her joke about the picture being transformed into a snow-scene? The subconscious memory of a bit of art-history gathered in her student days. What had sent Habgood, the only man with any sort of connoisseurship, to the Long Gallery, before anybody else could check up on Robin's apparently fantastic story? Fuller knowledge of the same bit of history. That was as much as I

could obscurely guess while the episode was taking place. Now I can add what I discovered later.

"Breughel is believed to have painted four companion pictures: an identical scene, but at the four seasons of the year. *Spring* and *Summer* survive – the first in Hungary and the second in a public collection in New York.

"Long ago, a Fray came into possession of *Autumn*. But his grandson – it was long before a Pieter Breughel was accounted very valuable – gave it away to a friend who fancied it, but first caused a mediocre copy to be made by an itinerant painter from the Low Countries. No doubt he wanted some record of a landscape that a little recalled his own estate. Later still, the original *Autumn* perished in a fire. The copy that remained at Fray had, of course, no more than historical interest or value; nobody would give more than a few hundred pounds for it at the most.

"The fourth painting, *Winter*, had long been thought to have perished. But Charles Fray, who was a collector, had run it to earth somewhere. Knowing that the English Frays had once owned the original *Autumn*, he brought *Winter* with him on his visit, intending it as a parting gift – a princely gift – to his kinsman and to the home of his ancestors. Miss Shibley's joke prompted him to substitute it for the old copy of *Autumn* just before leaving. The old copy of *Autumn* itself he simply left leaning against the wall. The situation, he supposed, would thus at once explain itself, and at the same time give Robin, to whom he had taken a great fancy, a little amusement.

"So you see what happened. As soon as Robin tumbled in on us with his story, Habgood realised

that *Winter* had turned up – and that if he could make off with it when only Robin had seen it, the boy would simply be disbelieved. Things might, of course, go wrong if Charles Fray made inquiries. But if Charles got no acknowledgement of his gift from his English kinsman he would almost certainly remain silent; and if *Winter* was subsequently heard of on the market he would presume that John Fray was behind the sale. Habgood was astute."

Our hostess considered. "But not at all nice. What happened to *Winter*?"

"It hangs in Robin Fray's bedroom now. And I don't think he'll ever have to sell it. The benevolent transatlantic cousin has been around again, and Robin looks like being his heir."

HERE IS THE NEWS

"The Steel affair?" Appleby nodded through a drift of cigar-smoke. "I was certainly involved in it – although purely by chance. I stumbled into the thing. Or it might be better to say that I braked on it – hard."

At this, recollection came to me. "In fact, Appleby, you were in a car immediately behind?"

"I was – and it may be that I was driving a shade faster than I ought to have been. It was at night, you know, and there were pockets of mist here and there on the road. Still, I was doing nothing reckless. The car in front – it appeared to be a large limousine – was making as good a pace as I had a mind to myself, so I was keeping about a hundred yards behind. The thing happened just when it had swung round a bend."

"The shooting?"

"Well, in the first instance it was simply that the driver of this big car must have stopped uncommonly quickly. The surface was good – but nevertheless he had skidded, slewed across the road, and ended with one front wheel in the ditch. 'Ended' is, of course, the word. By the time I arrived on the scene John Steel was dead. Shot through the temple."

Appleby paused on this, and I asked a question. "Steel was known to you?"

"Not from Adam - except, of course, by reputation. He was a man of some consequence - even notoriety - in his particular business world. He was credited with immense brains. Quite a lot of them were spattered about inside that car. The name - the impressive name of John Steel - was murmured or muttered or gasped at me by the young man."

"There had been somebody else with Steel?"

"There was this young secretary, who was called Briggs. He was out in the road when I came up - with the revolver in his hands, turning it over and staring at it."

I shook my head. "He oughtn't to have been doing that."

Appleby smiled grimly. "People do. Fingerprints and so forth don't much stick in a layman's head when he is suddenly confronted with violent death. And young Briggs had all the appearance of having sustained a tremendous shock. He was in a sort of daze or dream. Indeed, there was something puzzling about him - something I couldn't place. And that, mind you, although my experience with such situations and conditions now has a very tolerable claim to be called extensive."

"What did Briggs say?"

"For a time he said nothing very coherent. But what I gathered from him eventually was this. He had accompanied his employer on a visit to his partner, Charles Counterpoyn, in the country. The two partners had talked business in private for the better part of the day. Then there had been dinner, and after that Steel and young Briggs had set off on their return to town. Briggs had a notion that Counterpoyn, too, was

returning to town tonight, and was probably some way behind us on the road at that moment."

"Steel had no chauffeur with him?"

"No. He drove himself, and Briggs was shoved into the back, with a glass partition up and a blind down, so that he could have a light on and work at some papers. It was a regular set-up, it seems, when those two drove through the night. Only this time it hadn't quite worked, for Briggs had felt uncontrollably drowsy and dropped into a sleep. Or so he said."

"And what else did he say?"

"He said that what woke him up was the car coming to a stop with a jerk and then tilting over. Knowing that something must be badly wrong, he let up the blind in front of him. He was just in time to see his employer, still at the wheel, in the act of blowing his brains out. He didn't remember clearly anything after that until I found him standing in the road holding the gun."

I shook my head. "It must have struck you as a pretty queer yarn, my dear Appleby. Here is this financial magnate driving composedly through the night in what was virtually entire solitude. And then quite suddenly he pulls up, produces a revolver, and shoots himself. It just doesn't make sense."

"Quite so. And Briggs was evidently aware that things wore an ugly look. I thought it proper to tell him at once that I happened to be from Scotland Yard. He was scared stiff, and mumbled something about saying nothing more except in the presence of his solicitor. We might well have got no further, but for the arrival, with a hoot and

a scream of brakes, of Charles Counterpoyn. That livened things up."

"Steel's partner?"

"Yes – and what you might call a dominating personality. It took him no time to size up the situation and he seemed all for pushing us about. Briggs was prepared to take it. But it's something that a policeman, whether he be a constable or Assistant Commissioner, doesn't in these circumstances at all fancy. And when Counterpoyn told me to drive off and find a doctor, I was prompted to a little hard professional thinking. I wonder if you'd care to hear the result?"

"Hear the result?" I watched Appleby in some surprise as he walked down the long room to what it sometimes pleases him to call his museum. When he returned it was with a cardboard box from which he produced a small spool of metal tape. "Do you mean, my dear Appleby, that you are going to play me something?"

"Just that," Appleby was now bending over some sort of machine. "It struck me, you see, that there was something odd about Charles Counterpoyn's following along like that. I wondered if conceivably he had some design – whether on young Briggs or on Steel's body, or even on something in Steel's car.

"I remembered the fact of Briggs' feeling unaccountably sleepy and dropping off. And I reflected on what you yourself have mentioned: the seeming solitude and silence in which Steel was suddenly prompted to kill himself. So I had a go at the car – keeping, I may say, a wary eye on both Counterpoyn and Briggs meanwhile. And

presently I – well, I elicited something. Just what, you are now going to hear. And just *when*, by the way, is of some significance. So bear in mind that the time was now about 9.15."

Appleby ceased speaking, and as he did so strains of music began to issue from the machine beside him. After perhaps a couple of minutes, this faded behind a chime of bells – and presently I realised that I was listening to Big Ben striking nine. There was a moment's pause, and then a familiar voice followed: "*This is the BBC Home Service. Here is the news...*"

I turned to stare at my friend. "But, Appleby, didn't you say that it was already a quarter past-?"

Appleby held up a silencing finger, and I listened to the headlines being read in the announcer's level tones. And with the last of them something like light broke on me. "*Armed with a search-warrant, police officers from New Scotland Yard today visited the head office of Messrs. Steel and Counterpoyn...*"

"The firm had been exposed at something criminal? Steel switched on the nine o'clock news and realised that it was all up with him?"

Appleby shook his head. "Steel *thought* he switched on the nine o'clock news – which was his regular habit when he was in his car at that hour. But I couldn't, you know, with some rummaging about, have switched it on all over again at nine-fifteen. What in fact he switched on was an entirely bogus news bulletin recorded on this tape – and very ingeniously wired up to the car radio by our friend Counterpoyn."

"Counterpoyn had had enough of his fellow-crook Steel. He couldn't trust him. Or rather he

could only trust him in one particular – to keep his word to shoot himself the moment he believed that exposure had come.”

“Briggs had been drugged?”

“Yes – at dinner, so that he wouldn’t by any chance listen, too. And Counterpoynt was tagging along behind to remove his contraption from the radio. He was uncommonly upset when I did the job for him.”

THE REPRISAL

"Cellini's salt-cellar?" As he sat down opposite Lord Funtington, Appleby showed surprise. "Isn't that in Vienna?"

"You're thinking of the big one." Funtington was impatient. "Ours is much smaller, but the workmanship is quite as good. Cellini made it for Pope Clement VII, as he did many of his finest things. It's been in my family for quite a long time. The second earl bought it along with some other Medici treasures. You'll have heard of the Funtington Signorellis and the Funtington Piero."

Appleby nodded. "Certainly. I've seen them in New York."

Lord Funtington flushed faintly. "No doubt. We've been obliged to part, you know, with a number of our things. But we still have the salt-cellars. Or we had it – until last night."

"It's been stolen?"

Funtington hesitated. "It's gone. The matter may be delicate. Discretion is needed, my dear Sir John. That's why I'm uncommonly glad you have been able to come along yourself."

"Discretion is something one has to be rather discreet about." Appleby offered this stonily. "May I have the facts?"

"My wife gave a party last night, and we played – well, some rather childish games. You will

understand that only quite intimate friends were present. Not more than eighty guests."

"I see. A very cosy affair. And the games?"

"The games involved scampering all over the house. And for the last one we turned off the lights. I needn't bother you with explaining it."

Appleby nodded. "As to that, I'm quite willing to remain in the dark for the moment. And the salt-cellar?"

"There was rum punch and hot chestnuts going, and we thought it would be rather fun really to use Cellini's piece. So we stood it beside the chestnuts on a table in the grey drawing-room."

"I see." Appleby, who had been making a note, took off his glasses and stared at Lord Funtington very hard. "You asked some eighty people into this house, showed them a pocketable object of enormous value, and then turned out all the lights. Am I to understand that when they came on again it was with immense surprise that you discovered the salt-cellar to have vanished?"

Lord Funtington frowned. "I'm dashed if I quite like your tone. But the thing had certainly gone."

"What did you do?"

"Just at the moment, I didn't do anything. Or rather I consulted my wife, and we agreed that nothing could be done. There was an exalted personage present, you see, and also several distinguished foreigners. There was nothing to do but pretend not to notice, and get in touch with the police - with yourself, in fact - afterwards."

"I suppose you've also got in touch with your insurance people?"

"Oh – of course. That goes without saying."

Appleby nodded grimly. "I've no doubt it does."

"But now I'm uncommonly uneasy." Lord Funtington hesitated once more, and rather distractedly reached for a silver cigarette-box. "Smoke? I keep on forgetting, since I don't myself. Now, what was I saying? Ah, yes. The party was only friends, as I've said. Or rather friends and relations."

"Quite so." Appleby had known investigations drift this way before. "In fact, you believe that one of your own—"

The sentence remained unfinished. For a door had flung open. Lady Funtington, pale and agitated, strode into the room.

She took one glance at the two men, and appeared to divine the situation in a flash. "Charles," she cried, "you must drop it. The disgrace would be unthinkable. I implore you to send that gentleman away."

Appleby, who had stood up, smiled faintly at this note of melodrama. "I'm afraid I can't be sent away, Lady Funtington. Your husband has called in the police, and I think he has communicated to his insurance company what is equivalent to a formal claim. Isn't that so, sir?"

Funtington, who had also risen, moved uneasily. "My wife is right. I regret this."

"Perhaps you do." Appleby spoke softly. "But I am afraid it is your duty to speak what is in your mind."

Funtington had walked moodily to a window. When he turned round, it was to speak with a sudden unexpected savagery. "Very well. Rupert Stride is in my mind. The name will tell you that

he is my first cousin, damn him. And he's much less my friend than my wife's. He got back from some crazy wanderings in Italy a week ago, broke to the world. And his record won't bear—"

"Stop!" Lady Funtington was now looking at her husband in momentary naked fury. Appleby kept still. This sort of fracas also was sadly familiar to him. "It's mean and horrible. Rupert—"

"No doubt, my dear, you don't relish inquiry about Rupert." Lord Funtington gave a smile that Appleby judged extraordinarily ugly. "But one cat is out of the bag, anyway. If your precious friend stole his own mother's diamonds, it's surely likely enough that he wouldn't stop at pocketing a bit of a mere cousin's plate."

"But he took the diamonds when he was a mere boy!" Lady Funtington was desperate. "And even if—"

"May I interrupt?" There was something in Appleby's voice that made the excited husband and wife fall silent at once. "Lord Funtington, you had something to say about discretion. Well, I doubt whether it will be discreet to go on discussing the matter in this way. I have a practical measure to recommend."

Lord Funtington produced a silk handkerchief and nervously dabbed his forehead. "Then recommend it."

"I can have half a dozen skilled men here in ten minutes. And I propose that they search this house."

"Search my house!" Lord Funtington was pale with anger.

"Certainly. It is an indispensable first step on any premises from which an article of value is

reported to have vanished."

"Then search and be damned."

"Thank you. And may I ask you both to meet me here in three hours time?"

The salt-cellar, Appleby thought, was undoubtedly a magnificent thing. It had been fitted with a glass lining to which some grains of salt still adhered. He turned it in his hands so that the jewels and enamel gleamed again. And then he looked mildly at the Funtingtons across the table. "I'm glad it was so easy," he said. "To tell you the truth, sir, your dressing-room was the first place I told my men to have a go at."

Lord Funtington sprang up with a cry. He had every appearance of a man who has received a staggering shock. "How dare you, sir! This is a monstrous impertinence...a disgraceful trick."

"It may certainly be the latter." Appleby tapped the glittering salt-cellar before him. "It's easier to play tricks with – isn't it? – than a Piero or a Signorelli." Appleby turned to Lady Funtington. "I am afraid that this must be very painful to you. And I am also afraid that we are not yet quite at the bottom of it. Do you know what I have here?" He picked up a small object from the table and held it out before him. "I found it wedged between the glass and the gold."

Lady Funtington leaned forward, bewildered. "It appears to be a match – a sort of wax match. But an unusually small one."

"Precisely. And it brings Mr Rupert Stride into the picture, after all. This sort of smoker's match is far smaller than anything you get in England. It comes, in fact, from Italy, where it is called *cerino*. And from Italy Mr Stride returned only

last week. I don't think he gave these matches to your husband, for Lord Funtington doesn't smoke... Ah, here is what I have been waiting for." Appleby paused as a constable entered and placed a black garment on the table before him. "The gentleman didn't object, Joyce?"

"No, sir – said you were welcome. Amused, he seemed to be."

"Thank you." Appleby waited until the man had gone. "Mr Stride's dinner-jacket." He turned the right-hand pocket inside out. "I thought so. Salt."

Lady Funtington stared at the tiny white pile. "You mean that Rupert really–?"

"Yes, Lady Funtington. He pocketed the salt-cellar. But he did so guessing that it had been a temptation which Lord Funtington deliberately set in the way of his old weakness. Into the motive of that, we needn't enter. Mr Stride then made his way through the house under cover of darkness, and left the salt-cellar where Lord Funtington would have some difficulty in accounting for its turning up. It would look, in fact, as if your husband were doing his own thieving with an eye to defrauding his insurance company."

Appleby rose. "Neither gentleman can be said to have behaved well. But I must say that I prefer the reprisal to the original blackguardly plot."

BEAR'S BOX

"You say that this is a serious loss?" Appleby took a swift glance round the laboratory, lavishly equipped with apparatus that was wholly mysterious to him. The door of the strongroom at the far end was still open. Holiday, the Director, was standing beside a table on which stood a telephone, much as if he had not moved since sending Appleby his urgent summons. Holiday's assistant, a young man called Sambrook, was half perched on a bench, staring at his chief in sombre consternation.

"A very serious loss indeed." Holiday was silent for a moment. "It's Nicolson's improved epsilon valve. Clean vanished."

"I see." Appleby was not, in fact, very confident that great light had come to him. "Is it a bulky affair?"

Sharply and unexpectedly, the intent young man called Sambrook laughed. "Before Tim Nicolson went off on his trip to Washington," he said, "he lodged the valve in the strongroom there. It was like a pigeon's egg snugly tucked up in cotton-wool by a small boy. And its container was simply a tin out of which Tim had tipped a hundred cigarettes. Tim sealed it up, of course, and that was that. We don't go in for much window-dressing here. We just get on with the job. We were going to do that tonight, the

Director and myself. And now this damnable discovery has interrupted us."

Holiday smiled grimly. "Sambrook sees this as an interruption. It's my business to acknowledge it as a catastrophe. I opened the strongroom to get something quite different - but some instinct made me notice the loss at once. I was staggered."

"You certainly gave the hell of a yelp, sir." Sambrook offered this scarcely respectful comment with unabated gloom.

"But there's no doubt of the fact." He turned to Appleby. "It's the very devil - and puts all three of us in a pretty sticky place."

"All three of you?" Appleby glanced from one man to the other.

"Tim himself is out." It was Sambrook who continued to explain. "He's in Washington, as I've said. And, anyway, there would be no point in his making off with what he alone on earth knows inside out. No, sir. The trouble lies between the Director here, myself and Edward Bear."

"You haven't yet told me about Edward Bear."

"Bear is our senior research worker." Holiday now took up the tale. "He's a very privileged young man. Nephew of the Minister. Lives with him, in fact." There was something acrid in the Director's voice. "And now, you must be told about the keys. We work, you know, under regulations laid down for us - and it isn't for me to say that they're damned nonsense. Only the four of us - Nicolson, Sambrook, Bear and myself - have keys to the strongroom. They are so constructed - and it must have been a pretty problem for the locksmiths - that access may be

gained by any two of us together, but not by any one of us on his own."

Appleby considered. "Unless you passed the keys about?"

"That goes without saying. But it's against our rule to do so."

"What was the position earlier tonight, Dr Holiday?"

"The tin was certainly in the strongroom when Sambrook and I locked up and went out to dinner. I got back not much more than an hour ago. Sambrook says that he let himself in about half an hour before that. About twenty minutes after my arrival we had this occasion of mine for opening the strongroom, and I saw that the tin was *not* there."

"You've checked up on Bear?"

Holiday nodded emphatically. "I rang him instantly - even before contacting you. He answered at once. I didn't tell him of what I had discovered, but simply said that I might be dropping round. He said he was working late, as he always does at home, and that I could drop in without inconveniencing him any time up to one o'clock. I'm bound to say that sounded quite normal. But he's a cool card." The Director paused deliberately. "So, for that matter, is Sambrook."

Sambrook smiled, but without much appearance of gaiety. "Thank you, sir," he said dryly.

Appleby nodded. "If you'll just lock up," he said, "we'll all go round and call on this young man together. My car's outside. You know the address?"

"Of course." Holiday was impatient. "I've visited both the Minister and the young man there often enough."

"Then, as I say, we'll go round and settle things."

"Settle things?" Sambrook repeated the words sharply.

"Certainly." Appleby was mildly surprised. "It doesn't seem a very intricate problem to me."

There appeared to be justice in the statement that Bear was a privileged young man. He had a large book-lined room, elaborately equipped as a study. "I've been here ever since my uncle and I parted after dinner," he said. "It's our regular habit. I work on my notes here, and he gets through his papers next door. Sometimes we meet for a drink about midnight, but we don't interrupt each other with visits. So I can't, you see, prove that I didn't go out."

"Can't you, Teddy? I think you can." The Minister, so far, had been silent - a grave figure immobile before the fireplace, intently taking the situation in. "It's true that I didn't hear you make a sound - or true in one sense. But what about that infernal toy of yours?" He turned to Holiday. "You remember it?"

The Director shook his head. "I don't know what you're talking about, Minister."

"This." The Minister stepped to Bear's desk and flicked back the lid of a cigarette-box. The room was instantly filled with a clear, melancholy stave of music. "Teddy's musical box. I can always just hear it, when I'm in my room next door. And at night the boy smokes like clockwork." The

Minister closed the box and the tune ceased. "A cigarette every fifteen minutes. And it was so tonight."

Holiday frowned. "You realise, Minister, that if Bear did in fact never leave the room, then both Sambrook and myself—"

The Minister raised a hand. "I think, Holiday, that I realise a good deal. For instance, that I might be taken to be shielding my nephew. We need more information. The question is how to get it."

Holiday nodded. "Very well. I have one suggestion which I hope will be considered reasonable. There may have been a trick. This room should be searched."

"Searched!" Young Edward Bear was suddenly angry. "Do you realise, sir, that you're in the house of a Minister of the—"

But again the Minister raised a hand. "You are quite right, Holiday," he said calmly. "Appleby, if we all stay here and give you plenty of time, could you search the room yourself?"

Appleby smiled. "I'd like to," he said.

It was less than half an hour later that the little musical stave was heard in the room again. This time, it came not from the musical box but from a tape-recorder on a table near Bear's desk. There was a deathly silence among the four men for seconds after the tune had tinkled to its close. They all knew that in fifteen minutes the same sound would be heard. Appleby had found the long spool of metal ribbon on which it was recorded stowed away in a small cardboard container behind a row of books.

"So now we know." Holiday turned to confront Bear and Sambrook. "We know that we have two young criminals in this room."

"On the contrary." Appleby, seeming to take an aimless stroll, planted himself before the door. "We know that we have one elderly one." He turned to the Minister. "The missing valve, I am sorry - or glad - to say, is in the Director's pocket. He put it there the instant he entered the strongroom, and just before giving the yelp that brought Sambrook in after him. It's there still, because he's had no opportunity to part with it since."

For a moment the Minister appeared incredulous. Then he took a glance at Holiday and saw that it was the truth. "But this ribbon?"

"Too clumsy for words. Bear, if guilty, could have erased the tune from it in seconds simply by pressing a switch. Holiday had it prepared, and planted it where I found it. He was good enough to tell me that he frequently called in here." Appleby paused. "First to create Bear's musical alibi and then make sure that it should appear to break down was a clever idea in a general way. But the execution has been merely childish."

"But can you be sure-?"

"I know it was Holiday who hid the thing where I found it, simply because he guided me to the hiding-place. That's why I was so quick. You know hypersensitive people who, as a parlour game, can find any object hidden in a room from the tiny, involuntary and unconscious hints that the hiders betray? It's the same, I assure you, with a trained detective. Holiday thought he was sitting there immobile and poker-faced, letting me find what he had planted in my own good

time. But I can tell you that within ten minutes he was virtually shouting at me: '*Look there!*' So I looked."

Appleby didn't move from the door. "Minister, will you be good enough to take up the telephone and call the Yard?"

TOM, DICK AND HARRY

"Old Josiah Hopcutt", Appleby said, "was a prosperous manufacturer. And he continued prosperous when he had ceased to manufacture anything except large-scale tedium for the people looking after him. He lived on into old age, that is to say, in a semi-embalmed condition in an enormous villa in Harrogate."

"Was he Hopcutt's Hosiery?" I asked.

"He was. His whole career might be described as a sort of mission. He persuaded the women of England that they had legs, and a moral duty to display them. Not that Hopcutt wasn't rather a stuffy old boy himself. Very strict views on propriety, and so forth. And his only known exercise of the sense of humour - if it can be called that - was in the names he gave his three sons. He had them christened Tom, Dick and Harry."

"They were triplets?"

"Not a bit of it. He just seemed to know that his excellent wife was going to bear him three sons, and went ahead on that basis. There were no daughters, by the way. Mrs Hopcutt died giving birth to Harry, and that finished the family. And the boys, I think, grew up not caring for their father very much."

Appleby paused for a moment, and I asked one of those questions with which I like to help him

along. "And the hosiery business? Did Tom, Dick and Harry take to that?"

"Decidedly not. Getting the glamour into wool and lisle and silk and nylon didn't appeal to any of them. If Tom had any interest in legs, it wasn't in calculating what could be done for them at fourteen-and-eleven the pair. He married a chorus-girl, was divorced, and then took himself off to Canada."

"In disgrace with his father?"

"I think in no more than mild disgrace. The old chap, although strict, was not fanatical. Tom was really called away by a lust for adventure, and in one way and another he contrived to lead an uncommonly dangerous life. He made one trip home, and it revealed him as having turned into a handsome, bearded, frontier-forwarding type. Then off he went again."

"And Dick?"

"Dick too was enterprising in his way – although his history is a sad one. He lost his sight in a Commando raid. That was rather bad, because he'd wanted to be a painter. However, he hitched on to a group of scientists engaged in acoustic research, and developed to a preternatural degree of sensitiveness what was already a fine ear. Moreover he was intelligent, so he quickly got hold of what this branch of science was about, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that he might make important contributions to it. He lived in almost complete retirement, dedicated to this work."

"Which leaves us," I said, "with Harry."

"You're quite right." Appleby gave what I sometimes feel is a rather unnecessary smile. "So

it does.

"Harry was some sort of unsuccessful broker, and his way of life was, for the most part, as prosaic as his father's had been. Nevertheless he had a streak of his brothers' enterprise and adventurousness, and it came out in a hobby to which he was passionately given. Harry was a speleologist."

"Caves?"

"Caves and underground rivers and so on. It's quite a widespread activity nowadays, and Harry belonged to several clubs and societies concerned with that sort of exploration. But he was also a bit of a lone wolf, and would go off from time to time and do a bit on his own. One would be inclined to say that nothing more dangerous could be conceived."

"I haven't mentioned that Harry was unmarried. He lived by himself, looked after only by an elderly housekeeper, and he was quite free to develop this subterranean obsession as he pleased. Eventually it got so that he was off on it every other weekend. Well, he was just packing up for one of these occasions when the housekeeper brought him a telegram. He opened it and gave an exclamation of annoyance. 'The Savage,' he said. 'Arrived at Southampton. What a confounded nuisance!'

"The housekeeper, who hadn't been with Harry very long, didn't make much of this. 'My brother Tom,' he said, 'back in this country and proposing to visit me. He must look after himself for a few days elsewhere. When he calls, say I may possibly be back on Monday.' And Harry finished packing and went off, having scribbled down an address in Yorkshire that would find him."

"Did he always leave an address?" I asked.

"Apparently he did - although sometimes he would wander on and become untraceable. There was certainly nothing out-of-the-way in his going off as he had done. And what he had said prepared his housekeeper for the bearded figure that turned up only a few hours later. The woman explained that her employer had gone off after receiving the telegram, and that he would probably be back in three or four days. The Savage didn't seem too pleased, but he cleared out at once, simply saying that he would call his brother up on the telephone."

Appleby paused as if to consider how to tell the rest of his story. "Well, Harry turned up in Yorkshire, and spent a couple of days with a group of enthusiasts who were old acquaintances of his. Then he moved on, with only a vague reference to his perhaps having a look at the Grendale Cleft."

"What was that?"

"Some means of getting down to a system of underground caves in Cumberland. After that, as you may perhaps guess, Harry Hopcutt simply vanished. Eventually the police were called in."

"Yourself?"

Appleby shook his head. "A young fellow called Howley. It seems that for quite a time Harry's housekeeper took no alarm, since she was accustomed to these disappearances and silences. It was the Savage who eventually kicked up a fuss. He had rung up several times with inquiries. Eventually, and when nearly three weeks had elapsed, he presented himself at Scotland Yard and demanded action. Nobody could say he was making an unnecessary fuss. A

hunt for Harry was instituted all over the country. What was eventually found was some clothes, a rucksack, and a frayed rope."

"At that Grendale Cleft?"

"No – but at a similar spot, much more remote and dangerous, called the Gimlet. The discovery meant that Harry had vanished for ever. Alph the sacred river itself was not less likely to give up its dead than were the waters beneath that ghastly shaft.

"What followed was commonplace enough. Family solicitors took charge, and the Bearded Savage moved into Harry's flat in order to straighten things up. It was there that this young Detective-Sergeant of ours, Brian Howley, made a final call on him. The Savage had offered a reward for any information leading to the discovery of his brother, and it was simply Howley's duty to explain that the police had done the whole job and there was nobody to make a claim. This took him five minutes – and would have taken him only four, had there not been a very brief interruption while the Savage took a telephone call. 'Yes,' he had said into the instrument, 'Tom Hopcutt speaking.' He had repeated this, waited, and then put down the receiver. 'Odd,' he had said casually to Howley in his Canadian accent. 'A long-distance call. But the fellow rang off.'"

Appleby paused. "Howley thought nothing of it. But, within a matter of hours, the Bearded Savage was in gaol."

I was startled. "He had killed Harry?"

"My dear fellow, he *was* Harry. Surely that's clear enough?"

"You can't do much in a false beard," Appleby explained, "except briefly and as *tour de force*. Well, it was like that Harry presented himself to his own housekeeper, after having sent himself the telegram. Then he went off to Yorkshire, showing among his friends in his proper identity. After that he went into seclusion and grew the real beard – making those occasional telephone inquiries of the housekeeper, and faking matters at the Gimlet, meanwhile. Once the beard was established, he was ready to make his permanent appearance in Tom's shoes."

"But why? What was this in aid of?"

"He had discovered that Tom had died in Canada – but in circumstances so obscure that nothing would ever be heard of it. And by himself *becoming* Tom, he bypassed Dick as his father's heir. Or he would have done, if he hadn't been found out."

"And how, my dear Appleby, was he found out?"

"Dick's ear. Harry was reckoning on Dick's blindness – but he hadn't thought about *that*. It was Dick on the telephone, and Dick knew Harry had answered it, despite his attempted Canadian accent. Of course the moment we started investigating, the bogus Savage was done for."

THE LOMBARD BOOKS

"Some of the objects are a little problematical, I admit." Sir John Appleby let his eye travel over what he called his museum.

"For instance, that perfectly innocent-looking copy of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. What do you make of it?"

I peered at the volume cautiously. "Nothing whatever. But I remember a famous sentence in it. 'Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery.' So I hope its associations are not of a kind that Miss Austen would have deprecated." I picked up the book. "It looks harmless enough."

Appleby grinned. "As a matter of fact, it's an infernal machine."

"Bless my soul!" I made to drop the thing hastily. Then, thinking better of this, I laid it carefully back in its place. "The villain who contrived it must have had a most perverted sense of humour."

Appleby shook his head. "I don't think there was much humour involved. And I may say there were more than a dozen of these infernal machines. This just happens to be the one I begged for my little collection. Have another look at it."

I took it up again cautiously.

"It's quite harmless now?"

"Well – that depends."

"The weight seems to be about what one would expect." I opened the cover and stared in some perplexity at a first printed page. "But, my dear Appleby, this *is* Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*." And I flicked over the pages. "In fact, it's a perfectly normal book."

Appleby was clearly delighted. "You would undoubtedly have said the same of the *Tom Jones*, the *Tristram Shandy*, the *Pickwick Papers*, and all the others. But they were, I assure you, infernal machines. Very infernal machines. But let me explain.

"You will no doubt recall the name of Lord Lombard? When the English language still kept its genius for understatement he would have been called a captain of industry. In point of fact he was pretty well its field-marshall. Moreover – to keep the figure for a moment – he had once carried his future baton in what was decidedly a private's knapsack. Lombard was a self-made man."

"There isn't, is there," I said, "much understatement in that traditional expression? Hyperbole could scarcely go further."

"No doubt." I felt Appleby was not disposed to do justice to the neatness of the point I had made. "But the old boy had really gone one better. He had contrived *several* self-made Lombards.

"The industrial empire he had built up was immense. It branched out into all sorts of widely differing activities – and he was said to keep almost every one of them under his own direct control. Then he was a philanthropist in the big, old-fashioned way, and had strong feelings about

educating the masses. He founded technical schools and colleges dealing with pretty well everything under the sun. He collected paintings, and I believe he had a very genuine if rather naïve delight in them. And he collected books."

"Did he," I asked, "collect Jane Austen?"

"Ah" – and Appleby smiled – "that brings me to the story."

"Old Lombard collected books just as one more rich man's hobby, no doubt. But there was nothing he was more proud of than the fact that as a young man he had been a great reader. He had read the English classics as part of some early scheme of self-improvement. And although his later career had left him little time to follow this up, he was proud of what he remembered. His talk was often, in a very simple way, literary talk. And when he went about starting his evening schools and opening his free libraries and so forth, he would bring in these old memories with genuine enthusiasm and great effect.

"In his old age – for he had come to that – he lived with an unmarried sister, who was a clever woman a good deal younger than himself, and with a middle-aged nephew, Amos Lombard.

"Amos held various subordinate responsibilities in some of his uncle's concerns, and it was natural to suppose that eventually he would come into full control. But old Lombard showed no disposition to get out of the saddle, and when he did give Amos a new job from time to time, it was generally just on the philanthropic and educational side.

"The venerable gentleman was full of drive still, and when he took time off from the detailed direction of a large whack of England's heavy industry, it was to make speeches to apprentices on self-help, and how to gain a liberal education after working hours, and the profit and pleasure of reading George Eliot and Dickens and the rest – all backed up with plenty of those well-remembered quotations. He looked as if he was going on for ever. And then – rather rapidly – he began to crack up. It was decidedly queer."

I didn't make much of this. "Queer?" I asked Appleby. "If Lombard was an old man at the end of a tremendously hardworking life, wasn't it natural enough?"

"That was what I said myself when his sister first came to me. It wasn't, by the way, an official visit. Miss Lombard had formed some connection with my wife's family, and they sent her along. I listened to her at first with no more than politeness, I must confess. But in the end I was convinced that there was something in her story. Her brother's mind and memory, she said, were still perfectly sound and clear. But he had unaccountably begun to lose all confidence in himself."

I considered this. "In his power to conduct all his industrial enterprises? That sort of thing?"

"It was more or less pervasive. From a thoroughly efficient and rather harshly dominating personality, Lombard was turning into a weak and indecisive old man who appeared to harbour some shameful secret. And Miss Lombard was convinced that his nephew Amos was responsible."

"What a sinister notion! Did Amos appear to be a villain?"

"Well, yes - I'd say he did. He struck me as having the family brains, a great deal of ambition, and a growing determination to get his uncle shelved and to take charge himself.

"They lived in the same house, and I inquired into the extent of their association. They met, it seemed, for business in the morning, with secretaries and so on present, and with Amos for the most part simply receiving instructions about this and that. In the evening they dined *en famille* with Miss Lombard, and then the two men would spend an hour together in a sociable way in the old man's library. Old Lombard still liked his little literary chat."

"Was it possible that, during this regular period at which they were alone together, Amos had hit upon some technique for getting his uncle down? This was Miss Lombard's suggestion. It seemed fantastic, but I felt it must be investigated.

"I set about inquiring after any *new* activities to which Amos might have been giving himself lately. And I found a very curious one: certain of the higher branches of printing."

I looked at Appleby in astonishment. "He took to it himself?"

"No. He simply got what he wanted through one of those technical colleges. You know how, when a few pages are missing from a rare and valuable book, they are sometimes supplied in facsimile? Under cover of that fact, Amos faked a number of his uncle's favourite books - for example, this edition of *Mansfield Park*."

"Faked them! You mean-?"

"Yes. He ingeniously falsified the stories in one or another prominent particular, upon which any sane man would feel he could trust his memory with confidence. If, for instance, you read this *Mansfield Park* you would find that Fanny marries Henry Crawford."

"Good lord!"

"Precisely. Amos, you see, would get his uncle involved in argument, work round to one of these fakes, and then confound him on the evidence of his own eyes. Old Lombard was on the verge of being persuaded that his mind must be going, and that it was indeed high time he should retire."

Appleby paused. "I shall always remember his relief and astonishment when I gave him an authentic copy of Jane Austen's novel."

THE MOUSE-TRAP

"Is that Sir John Appleby?" the voice asked. And it added, "Of Scotland Yard?"

"Appleby speaking. But you've been put through to me at my home address."

"I know, I know. And I'm most terribly sorry." The voice – it appeared to be that of a lowland Scot – was quite at ease in its apology. "I hope I haven't fetched you from your dinner."

Appleby, who found that he had brought his table-napkin with him to the telephone, said nothing. He had received this sort of call before.

"My only warrant for breaking in upon your privacy, Sir John, is a common friend. Lord Arthur Spendlove."

"Ah, yes." Appleby didn't precisely kindle. This gambit, too, he was familiar with.

"Arthur has told me how absolutely one can rely upon your discretion. I ought to say that my name is Macrae – Robert Macrae." The voice paused very briefly, as if upon this information Appleby ought decidedly not to have to cast about in his mind. And, in point of fact, the name did ring a bell. Robert Macrae was a very distinguished industrial chemist, and the head of a firm of high scientific repute. "Discretion," the voice went on, "is the essential thing. I want to consult you in the strictest confidence."

"My dear sir, you speak as if I were a family solicitor or a physician or a private inquiry agent. As it happens, I'm an Assistant Commissioner of Police. I can't possibly undertake to entertain confidential communications."

"Quite so, quite so." The voice was now betraying a shade of agitation. "But this is so very difficult a matter. Threats. Menaces. Or can it be a joke? Your experience could advise me. I'd hate to visit disgrace on what may be a mere whim or prank. But there are circumstances that make me...apprehensive. Could you run down?"

"Run down?" Appleby was so surprised that he repeated the words mechanically.

"Yes - and at once." The voice gave an address. "That's on the river, you know, just short of Bainton. Say forty minutes." Suddenly the voice spoke on a new queer note. "My God - it may be life or death to me!"

"If you consider yourself to be in some immediate danger, Dr Macrae, you should contact your local police-station at once."

"No, no - that's just what I want to avoid. But you'll come?"

"Yes, I'll come." In saying this, Appleby felt fleetingly that he was acting almost as oddly as Macrae was. Without ceremony, he put down the receiver. Five minutes later, he was driving rapidly west.

An estate-agent would have described Dr Macrae's house as standing in its own grounds. In the deepening summer dusk Appleby could just distinguish that these seemed to consist mostly of shrubberies, together with a tree-shaded lawn

running down to the river at the back. A burglar's paradise, he told himself professionally as he took the last curve of the drive. The house itself was large and gloomy, and from this aspect showed only a single light – a feeble glimmer in a porch before what must be the front door. The effect wasn't welcoming.

Not that the place was at all tumbledown. There was plenty of fresh paint in a forbidding chocolate tone, and through the open doors of a garage Appleby had glimpsed a couple of opulent cars. Their owner was presumably a wealthy man. But there was no sign that he was a particularly cheerful one.

Appleby rang the bell. It was of the antique sort that peals loud and long in some remote kitchen. There was rather a lengthy wait and then the front door opened. An ancient female servant, heavily armoured in starched linen before and on top, peered at the visitor suspiciously. "Who are ye for?" she asked in a strong Scottish accent.

"Good evening. I am Sir John Appleby. I have an appointment with Dr Macrae."

"An appointment?" The old woman seemed to regard this claim as an occasion of increased misgiving. "Come in, then. But ye'll hae to see Miss Hatt."

"My appointment is with Dr Macrae himself."

"Naebody sees the Doctor until Miss Hatt's had a worrd wi' him. This way."

Appleby found himself in a high, dusky hall. The panelled walls were ornamented with enormous oil-paintings of deer and Highland cattle, interspersed with claymores, dirks and the

species of small round shield conventionally associated with Rob Roy Macgregor. It was apparent that Dr Macrae cherished his Caledonian ancestry. They moved down a long corridor and came to a closed door at the end. In the room beyond, a man was talking, fluently and incisively, to the accompaniment of a clattering typewriter. The old woman opened the door and motioned Appleby forward. "A gentleman to see the Doctor," she said.

The typewriter stopped, but the voice – a Scottish voice – continued. It was advancing cogent reasons for being unable to subscribe to a charity organisation. Then the voice stopped too. Miss Hatt had silenced it by turning a switch on her dictaphone. "Your name?" she said.

"Sir John Appleby."

"You have an appointment with Dr Macrae?"

"He made an appointment with me by telephone, just an hour ago."

Miss Hatt, although her speech was quite dauntingly severe, was personable and in early middle-age. She suggested the possession of high professional proficiency, together with certain quite different qualities which might declare themselves upon appropriate occasions. At the moment, she appeared rather at a loss. Appleby guessed that his name had conveyed quite a lot to her. There was nothing surprising about that. But he rather wondered why she was so clearly perplexed by his visit. There might be half a dozen occasions for it, after all. "Then will you wait a moment," she asked, "while I tell Dr Macrae you are here?"

Briskly and competently, Miss Hatt rose and left the room. Her manner was entirely as it

should be; nevertheless Appleby found himself obscurely called upon to notice that her figure was excellent and her complexion really beautiful. He waited in solitude and patience – for he wasn't, as it happened, without something to think about. He waited rather a long time. And then Miss Hatt came in again. She was still brisk and competent – which made it a little odd that the beautiful complexion had vanished. Her face was pale and seemed faintly moist. "Did you know?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"*You are Sir John Appleby – of the police? When you sent me to find Dr Macrae, you knew that...he was dead?*"

The queerness of this question was almost as surprising as the news it conveyed. But it wasn't quite crazy. It was, in fact, just the sort of logic one sometimes gets from persons suffering from severe shock. "Nothing of the sort, madam. Put such an idea out of your head." Appleby walked up to the woman and looked at her searchingly but sympathetically. "You have actually found Dr Macrae dead?" he asked. "You are certain of it?"

She turned and gestured him out of the room. He could hear her taking a deep, gasping breath, as if determined to regain control of herself. "You will be certain yourself in a moment, Sir John. Dr Macrae has been...he has been murdered."

They went down another corridor and through a couple of baize-covered doors. The dead man appeared to have prized seclusion. His study was a book-lined apartment, sombre like everything else in this house, and fronting the lawn that ran down to the river. A french window was open

upon the warm July night, and directly before this the body of Robert Macrae sat at a large desk. Appleby walked round this. "Or perhaps," he heard Miss Hatt say behind him, "it might be suicide?"

It certainly hadn't been that. Macrae had been shot clean through the forehead at just short of point-blank range. His assailant had presumably walked up to the french window out of the darkness, killed his man, and walked away again. Appleby frowned. He didn't like the simplicity of the thing. It is the elaborately conceived murder that it is easier to get a grip on. "Suicide?" he said, and turned to Miss Hatt. He spoke as if with an entirely open mind. "It comes into your head as likely? Was Dr Macrae a sick man, or worried?"

"His arthritis was troubling him, and he found it rather difficult to get about. But I don't think it seriously worried him. Of course, he had been working very hard. He and Mr Ivor – that is his nephew, Ivor Macrae – have been on the verge of some extremely important discovery – a chemical process which would revolutionise man-made fibres."

"I see. Does Mr Ivor Macrae live here?"

"No, not now." Miss Hatt hesitated. "Only Mr Colin lives in the house. He is Mr Ivor's brother."

"And also a chemist?"

"Colin – Mr Colin – is an author."

"Ah, an author." Appleby, intent on examining the body, seemed to repeat the word absently. But he was really wondering if he had been right in detecting a note of warmth in Miss Hatt's voice. "But Mr Ivor too lived here until recently?"

Miss Hatt nodded. She was standing quite still near the door. It wasn't necessary to tell her not to wander about. As well as a good figure she had a good head. "Yes," she said. "But now Mr Ivor has a cottage of his own just up the river. He had a - a dispute with his uncle. It has been a great worry to Dr Macrae, particularly as they work so closely together at the laboratories."

"A professional dispute?"

"No. It has been entirely a family matter. Mr Ivor's father left a peculiar will, giving the control of very considerable property to Dr Macrae during his lifetime. Mr Ivor has felt the position to be increasingly absurd. As a result there was - well, almost a quarrel."

Appleby looked hard at Miss Hatt. "And now" - and he pointed with a certain grimness at the dead man - "Mr Ivor will get what he has wanted?"

"I suppose so."

"And Mr Colin too?"

Just perceptibly, Miss Hatt hesitated. She was still quite startlingly pale. "Oh, certainly. But, of course, he didn't break with his uncle in any way. I don't think property and money mean very much to Mr Colin Macrae. As I've said, he is an author - an artist."

"That makes a difference, no doubt." Permitting himself this fleeting irony, Appleby took a prowl around the room. "Is Mr Colin at home now?"

Miss Hatt was about to reply when there was an interruption. Abruptly out of the night, a man had appeared at the French window. "Hullo," he said. "Who's t-t-talking about m-me?"

It couldn't be said, Appleby reflected a few minutes later, that Colin Macrae took his uncle's sudden and shocking death very hard. But then it seemed likely that he didn't take things in general that way. He was easy-going, loquacious despite his pronounced stammer, and possessed of a personal modesty that Appleby didn't seem to recall as a very regular endowment of authors. And there was certainly something between him and Miss Hatt. He would do a lot for her, Appleby guessed. And perhaps she would do even more for him.

"B-b-but doesn't Ivor know?" Colin turned inquiringly to Miss Hatt. "He hasn't b-been over?"

"Certainly he has been over. I came upon him with Dr Macrae in this room half an hour ago." Miss Hatt was now impassive. "So it surprised me that Dr Macrae had made an appointment with Sir John. But when I came to tell Dr Macrae of Sir John's arrival, Mr Ivor, of course, wasn't here. There was only...the body."

A moment's silence succeeded upon this. It was broken by Appleby. "When he came to see his uncle, Mr Ivor was in the habit of simply walking in?"

"Yes. Or sometimes he would drop down the river in his dinghy and walk across the lawn."

"He had that familiar habit, despite the quarrel?"

"I wouldn't c-c-call it a quarrel." Colin Macrae had broken in, suddenly eager. "It's t-t-too strong a word. But Ivor is no good at p-personal relations. Too intellectual and h-h-highly strung. B-brains all the time. Archeology instead of g-g-golf. Chess problems, and competitions in highbrow weeklies, instead of thrillers and the p-

p-pools. The P-p-proceedings of the Royal Society as a b-bed-time book." Colin paused, as if vaguely aware of rambling. "N-n-not quarrelsome - n-n-not really."

"But he *did* quarrel with Dr Macrae, all the same." Miss Hatt's impassivity had hardened.

"Were they quarrelling when you came upon them half an hour ago?" Appleby asked this question gently.

Miss Hatt had one of her moments of fleeting irresolution. "Dr Macrae was denying something. I heard him say, rather hotly, 'I don't know what you're talking about.' I had taken Dr Macrae one or two letters to sign. But it was clearly an awkward moment, and I came away at once."

Again there was a silence. This time it was broken by the *purr-purr* of a telephone on the desk. There was something indefinably sinister in this summons addressed to an ear now sealed by death. Appleby brought a handkerchief from his pocket and picked up the receiver gingerly in its folds. He listened for some moments in silence. "Unfortunately not," he said. "I am, in fact, a police officer... I regret to have to tell you of Dr Macrae's sudden death... Yes, death... Yes, I think you very usefully might... At once? But certainly. Come right over now." He put down the receiver and stood motionless for a moment, frowning. He might have been trying to make sense of something he had heard. "Somebody called Cokayne," he said presently. "Declares himself to have rung up Dr Macrae because he felt uneasy."

"Uneasy?" Miss Hatt spoke sharply.

"Yes - but he didn't explain himself further. He's coming along, however, straight away. A colleague, I gather."

"The principal research assistant, working closely with Dr Macrae and Mr Ivor. He lives in the village." Miss Hatt was now composed and once more entirely businesslike. "Ought we not to try to contact Mr Ivor, Sir John?"

"His cottage is on the telephone? Then would you mind, Miss Hatt, going to another instrument, and trying to get him on that? I want this one handled as little as possible. And get the local police-station at the same time, and tell the fellow on duty what's happened. And tell him that I'm here. He'll know how to proceed." Appleby waited until the secretary had left the room, and then turned to Colin Macrae. "Is there - or was there - anything very valuable in this room?"

Colin shook his head. "I d-d-don't think so. All my uncle's things were s-s-solid, but not really good. He had no t-t-taste whatever." Colin paused to glance at the body. "And the s-s-set-up doesn't suggest his coming upon a thief."

"Perfectly true." Appleby was now systematically searching the room. "There's nothing," he said suddenly and sharply, "you ought to tell me?"

"I d-d-don't think so." Colin seemed unperturbed by the abrupt question.

"Do you think Miss Hatt knows anything?"

"It's not my business to speak for her."

"But you might be described as in one another's confidence?"

"That's quite irrelevant. I won't d-discuss it."

Appleby looked curiously at Colin Macrae. "Very well. But we don't yet know what *is* relevant. This is a complicated affair."

"I'd have thought it rather a s-s-simple one."

"That was my way of thinking, until a few minutes ago." Appleby was walking over to the fireplace – in which, despite the mildness of the summer night, a low fire was burning. "But now I've changed my mind." For a moment he stood quite still, staring into the small dull glow. Suddenly he stooped and fished something from a corner of the grate. It was a piece of charred paper.

"Have you found a c-c-clue, Sir John?" Colin Macrae, who a moment before had been reticent and dry, now spoke almost mockingly.

"It looks to be precisely that, doesn't it?" Appleby's reply was in the same tone. Nevertheless it was with an absorbed seriousness that he carried his find to a table, smoothed it out, and studied it. He studied it for a long time. Then he brought a notebook from his pocket, tore out a couple of leaves, and with these covered all but a narrow strip of the paper. "What I have found is part of a letter," he said. "Would you mind coming over and looking at it?"

Colin crossed the room silently and looked. Having done so, he showed no disposition to speak.

"Perhaps you can tell me whose writing this is?"

"It isn't c-c-clear to me that I ought to offer an opinion – or discuss the matter f-further with you at all, Sir John."

"I'm not asking for an opinion. I'm asking for assured knowledge, if you happen to have it."

"V-v-very well. It is my brother's writing – Ivor's writing."

"Thank you. And can you—"

Appleby paused as Miss Hatt entered the room again. They both turned to her expectantly. "I got the police," she said. "But there was no reply from Mr Ivor. I wonder whether—" Suddenly she broke off with a startled cry. Following her gaze, both men swung round.

Somebody else was now standing in the french window. It was a young woman. She could scarcely have been more than twenty. She was staring at the dead man with a look of transfixed horror. And then she cried out. "Ivor... Ivor — where are you?" She looked round the brightly lit room helplessly, and began to sway oddly on her feet. Making a dive forward, Appleby caught her as she fainted away.

The local police had come, and with them the police surgeon. Presently there would be detectives and photographers. Appleby had dismissed both Miss Hatt and Colin Macrae for the moment, and had himself withdrawn into another room. The latest arrival had been quickly restored to consciousness. But there seemed to be no reason why she should be interviewed in the presence of the corpse. Her name was Joyce Hereward. Once calmed and reassured, she gave an entirely coherent account of herself. But she remained in a considerable state of anxiety, all the same.

"Ivor Macrae and I are engaged. We are to be married this autumn. I live with my parents just beyond the village. Ivor and I go on the river a lot. He has a dinghy for messing about, and also a small motor-launch. This evening we were

going to take a late picnic out in the launch. So I told my parents, and walked over to the cottage."

Joyce Hereward paused. She had felt it important, Appleby thought, to get in that bit about her parents. She was very young, and almost certainly wholly ingenuous. "You had arranged this picnic some time ago?" Appleby asked.

"Yes, indeed. I've been looking forward to it all week!" For the first time Miss Hereward faintly smiled. "But just as we set out, Ivor was brought a telephone message, asking him to call on his uncle. We decided to do it on the way. So we tied up at the landing-stage here, and Ivor walked up to the house. I waited in the launch. We thought he wouldn't be long."

"There was no suggestion that you might come up to the house too?"

"No. Of course I know - I mean I knew - Dr Macrae. But we thought it would just be business. And then there was the fact—" The girl hesitated and fell awkwardly silent.

"You mean the fact that your uncle and your fiancé, had ceased to be on very good terms?"

"Yes." She nodded, at once apprehensive and grateful. "So I stopped. But it was quite a long time, after all. And then I thought I heard somebody - a man - cry out for help. It was getting nearly dark. I tried to persuade myself that what I had heard was something quite different - just somebody giving an ordinary sort of shout. So I went on waiting. But Ivor didn't come, and didn't come. Suddenly I became frightened. So I landed and walked up to the house. The light in the study window seemed to - to suggest security, and I made straight for it. I

told myself I'd find Dr Macrae and Ivor just talking away. But you know what I *did* find."

Appleby nodded kindly. "Yes, indeed. And I am very sorry that you had the shock."

Suddenly the girl's lip quivered. "But Ivor! Please, please, what has happened to him?"

It took Appleby a second to know how to meet this appeal. "That," he said gravely, "is something that I think we shall know quite soon."

"He wouldn't be...suspected? Ivor could never do a thing like that."

"I'm afraid that everybody concerned, Miss Hereward, must in some degree be suspected – until we clear the matter up."

"Can I help?" She was suddenly eager.

And once more Appleby produced his crumpled piece of paper. This time he concealed no part of it. "Is this your *fiancé's* handwriting?"

She glanced at it only for a moment. "Yes, it is." She looked pitifully up at him, as if hoping to discover that this was good news. What she saw made her shrink a little. "It can't mean anything bad?"

"Its meaning – or its significance – is obscure to me, Miss Hereward. And that, perhaps, is something. For it ought, you see, to be as damnable clear as daylight."

"You mean–?"

Appleby shook his head. And as he did so, the front doorbell pealed. "At least," he said, "we're making progress. For here, I think, is the last of our *dramatis personae*. Will you go and join Miss Hatt for a little? I must see this fellow on his own."

Charles Cokayne was smooth and featureless. Quite soon after a casual meeting, one would probably recall only that he had a cold grey eye.

"Why was I uneasy?" He made a small restrained gesture. "It is this family quarrel. For months it has been upsetting the relations of Dr Macrae with his nephew Ivor. That has been very bad for our work."

"And the work is very important just now? There is a big discovery pending?"

Cokayne smiled faintly. "That is the sort of story that is always going round. One day – perhaps, yes. But my chiefs, I think, had still rather a long way to go. And the friction between them didn't help."

"I see. And your uneasiness–"

"What I have feared is the secretary here, Miss Hatt. She is secretly passionate on Colin Macrae's behalf. And I believe her to be very unscrupulous. Yesterday I heard from Ivor Macrae that she had betrayed herself in a flash of temper as keyed up to any mischief. So I have been worried. And this evening I thought I would ring up Dr Macrae, and then come across and have a serious word with him about the situation."

"You were on terms with him that made that an appropriate course? He would have welcomed your intervention and counsel?"

Cokayne made his small gesture again. "I could only hope so, Sir John."

"You had no worries, no suspicions, about Ivor Macrae?"

"But certainly not!" Cokayne was emphatic. "Ivor is rash, and he had this open break with his uncle. But I have worked for him and with him for years, and I would never believe ill of him."

"That is very gratifying." And once again Appleby fished the enigmatic scrap of paper from his pocket. "You would agree that this fragment of a letter is in Ivor Macrae's hand? I wonder, Mr Cokayne, if you would oblige me by reading it - aloud?"

Cokayne raised his eyebrows - as he well might at this slightly strange request. Appleby wondered whether the action didn't reveal in the eyes themselves some glint of excitement. In Cokayne's hand, however, there was no tremor as he took the charred and crumpled paper. And what he read was in an even, carefully expressionless voice:

"My dear Uncle,

"You have twenty-four hours. If this surprises you, the fault is mine for hesitating as I have done. But if you have come to think of me as a man who cannot make up his mind, then you are, believe me, fatally wrong. Give up what you have unjustly taken, or you will not live to enjoy even what is rightfully yours. And decide within, I say, twenty..."

There was a moment's silence when Cokayne had finished reading the fragment. Then Appleby, who had been listening with a curiously strained attention, took back the paper. "Well," he asked,

"does this sound as if it's Miss Hatt who's for the Old Bailey?"

"No...it doesn't." Cokayne spoke hesitantly, as if his mind were groping its way into a new situation. "It sounds like something quite different."

"And that is?"

"Insanity!" Cokayne came out with the word vehemently. "Ivor Macrae could never turn into a calculating criminal – but he might, I suppose, turn into a madman. We can all testify that he is an intensely highly-strung intellectual type, who might conceivably –"

"Quite so." Appleby cut this short almost harshly. "The question is, where are we now? What happens to a man who writes this" – and he tapped the paper – "proceeds to act on it lethally, and then, on retrieving it, tosses it carelessly to the side of a feeble fire?"

Cokayne produced a handkerchief and nervously dabbed at his lips and forehead. "It's too horrible. It's an abomination. And that poor girl to whom he's engaged! But there's only one answer to your question. A man in that position has no future. And he'd be very mad indeed if he didn't know it."

"But you'd call this whole notion of Dr Macrae's wrongfully holding on to family property a bit crazy?"

"I know nothing about the rights and wrongs of the matter. But, looking at it in the light of what's happened, I can see that Ivor has been quite irrationally obsessed with it... I suppose a search is being organised?"

"Not yet. But it will be, within the next ten minutes." Appleby spoke grimly. "And I think that – dead or alive – we'll find Ivor Macrae quite soon."

"If I can give any help, I'll be glad. Miss Hatt has my telephone number."

"Thank you." Appleby, as if he had lost interest in Charles Cokayne, was already moving towards the door, with the charred letter held slightly out before him. It was almost as if he felt it to be in the strictest sense a clue, which his hand must follow if he was to gain the heart of the labyrinth.

Colin Macrae, Miss Hatt and Joyce Hereward were together in a large, bleak drawing-room at the front of the house. If it wasn't cheerful, at least it didn't harbour a corpse. The two women were conversing in low tones, and Colin was moodily turning the pages of a weekly paper. The young girl sprang to her feet as soon as Appleby entered. "Is there any news?"

"No – but it isn't news that's needed, Miss Hereward. It's some piece of logical inference – probably perfectly simple in itself – that I just haven't got round to." As he made this candid report, Appleby moved restlessly across the room. "Mr Macrae, what do you think of that fellow Cokayne?"

"I d-d-don't like him." The answer was prompt.

"Then you'll be glad to know I've discovered something he may have difficulty in accounting for. Unfortunately it seems inconsequential. It just doesn't fit in with...this." And Appleby tossed his letter on the table. "By the way, you'd better read the whole of it."

Colin Macrae threw down his weekly and moved over to read the letter. "I c-c-can't believe it," he said.

For a moment the two men looked at the fragmentary letter in silence. And then Appleby stiffened. "I can!" he exclaimed. "I believe I can – at last."

"You mean you know what h-happened?"

"I think I do. I think the explanation may have been – well, under your very nose not long ago. Just let me take a look—" Appleby broke off as the door opened and a police sergeant came hurriedly into the room. "Yes?"

"We've lost our man, sir." The sergeant was rueful. "He was on the drive, and must have tumbled to what was happening, and taken alarm at it. We think he slipped into the shrubbery and doubled back towards the river. One of our constables says he heard someone trying to start up a motor-launch there."

"That's bad." Appleby wasted no further time in recrimination, but turned to Colin Macrae. "You keep a launch here yourselves?"

"Yes – and it's in g-g-good order. I w-was out in it this afternoon."

"If we can get it moving within three or four minutes, we've some chance of averting a tragedy. Lead the way."

And they all tumbled from the room. But Appleby – rather surprisingly – spared seconds to sweep up a pile of newspapers and periodicals that lay on a window-seat. He was still clutching these as he doubled across the lawn.

Ivor Macrae's launch had vanished; it seemed plain that somebody had made his escape in it. But there appeared to be a chance that he was not yet far away, since the sound of an engine could just be heard fading down the river. The fugitive – Appleby thought grimly as he watched Colin unlock a boathouse – was doing rather more than just bolting. In fact he was still out to win. And that had meant an operation – at which Appleby could at last pretty confidently guess – by which his departure had been hazardously delayed. But if he now succeeded in doing what he was minded to do, he might yet get away with a lot. For it mightn't be very easy to prove – Colin's launch glided to the landing-stage and Appleby jumped in. Joyce Hereward did the same, and there was no time to expostulate. The engine roared and the vessel leapt forward. In the same instant Colin switched on a powerful searchlight in its bow, and a long reach of the river before them flashed into view. Here and there were the dim lights of vessels moored or anchored, and a few craft were still cruising through the soft summer night. Their own speed increased; a long curling wake was flying out from their stern; now and then Appleby thought he could hear indignant shouts. No doubt they were causing a sort of disturbance that the Thames Conservancy Board wouldn't much care for. But it wasn't a moment for worrying about that.

"Ten minutes!" Bending slightly forward, Colin was shouting in Appleby's ear. "We'll b-b-be up with him inside that."

Appleby nodded, and felt in his pocket for a torch. Switching it on, and wedging himself securely against a thwart, he began rapidly to

sort through his bundle of papers and journals. He caught Joyce Hereward staring at him in astonishment. "All right!" he called to her. "I'm pretty sure. But I just want to be certain... Ah!" He had found what he wanted, and within a couple of seconds he appeared to be satisfied. "Really simple – as all truly devilish plans are." He glanced at her with compassion. "I'm afraid there's – well, a crisis ahead. It will come when that launch passes under the first bridge."

"But that's almost at once! The railway–"

Colin Macrae gave a shout. "There he is! But he's crazy. He'll k-kill himself and–"

"The bridge!" Joyce Hereward was pointing forward. Appleby could now see, first, the fugitive launch, leaping and swerving madly on the surface of the river; and then, dimly and uncertainly beyond, two stone arches. A moment later the leading launch had plunged beneath one of them, seeming to miss by a hair's breadth the massive central pier. And in the same instant something could be seen hurled overboard.

Colin had cut out his engine, and their own speed was slackening. Appleby got to his feet, scanning the surface of the water. "There!" he cried – and dived. And even as he hit the water, he knew that the girl – as if prompted by some flash of intuition – had dived too.

When Colin Macrae, having lost sufficient speed to turn, swept back up river, it was to find Appleby and Joyce Hereward supporting in the water the inert body of a young man. With a good deal of difficulty, they were all got on board.

"Is he–?" The girl, kneeling in a puddle in the launch, looked imploringly at Appleby as he

presently knelt beside the unconscious figure of Ivor Macrae.

And Appleby smiled. "A little the worse for wear, Miss Hereward. But he's decidedly alive – and a perfectly innocent and honourable man."

Miss Hatt, not having been in at what was so nearly the death of Ivor, had to be given explanations next day.

"You remember the charred letter?" Appleby asked. "In it, the writer described himself as a man who couldn't make up his mind. Now, who is famous for just that?"

"Hamlet." Miss Hatt answered without a moment's hesitation.

"Precisely. And the simple explanation of the whole thing ought to have jumped at me at once. But it didn't – until, in the drawing-room last night, I saw Colin happening to turn over a copy of a weekly paper: *The New Spokesman*. And then I remembered. Ivor was in the habit of doing the competitions in that sort of paper. So I grabbed a pile of recent ones as I ran for that launch. And this is what I found, in the last *Spokesman* but one. Listen." And Appleby read:

"Prince Hamlet, having set the players to present *The Murder of Gonzago* and thus neatly caught the conscience of the king, unfortunately falls a prey to hysteria and loses his grip of the situation. A prize of two guineas is offered for a letter addressed by the Prince to his uncle at this point, cogently arguing that the game is up and he had better abdicate quietly."

Miss Hatt needed only a second to consider. "Cokayne found Ivor's unfinished attempt at the

competition?"

"Just that. And he saw that it could be passed off as an incriminating letter from Ivor to *his* uncle, which would fit neatly into this bit of trouble about family property. That gave him his idea."

"I see. But what was his motive?"

"You set me on the track of that yourself. Dr Macrae and Ivor were on the verge of perfecting a valuable chemical process, and Cokayne was their chief assistant. If he could liquidate both of them he would be able, after a discreet interval, to come forward with it as his own. I noticed that when I mentioned this piece of research to him, he at once played it down. His cunning was notable all the way through. He professed that it was you he suspected, and he gave Ivor a high character – while at the same time starting the notion that he might be subject to serious mental disturbance. But his real flair was for timing. His mouse-trap was a much more intricate affair than Hamlet's. And it almost came off pat."

Miss Hatt considered. "His first job was to get Ivor and yourself on stage at just the right moment?"

"Precisely... And while getting Ivor with a false message was comparatively easy, the getting me out here was tricky. The request was so queer – so cool, you might say – that I rather surprised myself by agreeing to it."

"Why did he have to have you at all, Sir John?"

"He wanted an expert who wouldn't miss that letter planted in the fireplace. And, of course, the notion of Dr Macrae's sending an alarmed appeal to the police was a useful one. What he didn't

reckon on was my hearing Dr Macrae's real voice on your dictaphone. I felt at once it didn't square with the voice on the telephone. There was a moment when I thought of Colin Macrae as having conceivably sent that, but I at once realised that his stammer ruled him out as impersonating his uncle. Then when Cokayne rang up and I took the call, I had an obscure feeling that here the actual voice might be. But it was only when I'd got Cokayne to read the letter aloud that I was certain. It was my first important discovery. Cokayne was deeply, although still quite obscurely, implicated.

"And now, consider the sequence of events. Ivor arrived by launch and went up to his uncle's study, where you saw him. The uncle and nephew were at cross-purposes – and what you heard, of course, was Dr Macrae denying that he had sent any summons. But before they got any further, Cokayne, lurking in the garden, gave his dramatic shout for help. Ivor dashed out, while Dr Macrae, being crippled, stayed put. Cokayne stunned Ivor, returned to the study, shot Dr Macrae, and planted the letter. Then he returned to Ivor, and hauled him down to the river. His plan was to take him away in his own craft and stage a suicide by drowning. But it had to be near a bridge."

"A bridge?" Miss Hatt, although so acute, was at a loss here.

"Because of that blow on Ivor's head. It must appear that he had thrown himself down from a height, and hit a pier or buttress. And now there was a first hitch: Joyce Hereward. Her presence in the haunch was the unexpected factor. So Cokayne hauled Ivor into shadow, tied him up, and waited. And the wait was his undoing. He

became nervous and felt – as criminals so often do – that he must have a look at the scene of the crime and make sure that all was going according to plan there. So he hurried home and made that odd call about being uneasy. He certainly *was* uneasy. Then he waited a little longer, and came up to the house. The discovery that the girl was now there, and the launch therefore deserted, gave him fresh confidence. So he played his part very well.”

“He certainly did. But he must have been on tenterhooks to get away.”

“Quite so. And he must have made a shrewd guess that he’d be watched, and that the position was pretty desperate. But if he could just get Ivor where he still wanted him, he had a chance of pulling the thing off even now. There was still that damning letter. But he failed.”

Miss Hatt was silent for a moment. “We are to be faced with the horrors of a murder trial?”

“No.” Appleby shook his head seriously. “You haven’t heard the end. After hurling Ivor overboard, Cokayne lost his nerve completely. As a result, he smashed the launch to matchwood against the next bridge, and was drowned. The engineer – as Hamlet, once more, has it – was hoisted with his own petard.”

Note on Inspector (later, Sir John) Appleby Series

John Appleby first appears in *Death at the President's Lodging*, by which time he has risen to the rank of Inspector in the police force. A cerebral detective, with ready wit, charm and good manners, he rose from humble origins to being educated at 'St Anthony's College', Oxford, prior to joining the police as an ordinary constable.

Having decided to take early retirement just after World War II, he nonetheless continued his police career at a later stage and is subsequently appointed an Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police at Scotland Yard, where his crime solving talents are put to good use, despite the lofty administrative position. Final retirement from the police force (as Commissioner and Sir John Appleby) does not, however, diminish Appleby's taste for solving crime and he continues to be active, *Appleby and the Ospreys* marking his final appearance in the late 1980's.

In *Appleby's End* he meets Judith Raven, whom he marries and who has an involvement in many subsequent cases, as does their son Bobby and other members of his family.

Appleby Titles in order of first publication

These titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1.	Death at the President's Lodging	Also as: Seven Suspects	1936
2.	Hamlet! Revenge		1937
3.	Lament for a Maker		1938
4.	Stop Press	Also as: The Spider Strikes	1939
5.	The Secret Vanguard		1940
6.	Their Came Both Mist and Snow	Also as: A Comedy of Terrors	1940
7.	Appleby on Ararat		1941
8.	The Daffodil Affair		1942
9.	The Weight of the Evidence		1943
10.	Appleby's End		1945
11.	A Night of Errors		1947

12.	Operation Pax	Also as: The Paper Thunderbolt	1951
13.	A Private View	Also as: One Man Show and Murder is an Art	1952
14.	Appleby Talking	Also as: Dead Man's Shoes	1954
15.	Appleby Talks Again		1956
16.	Appleby Plays Chicken	Also as: Death on a Quiet Day	1957
17.	The Long Farewell		1958
18.	Hare Sitting Up		1959
19.	Silence Observed		1961
20.	A Connoisseur's Case	Also as: The Crabtree Affair	1962
21.	The Bloody Wood		1966
22.	Appleby at Allington	Also as: Death by Water	1968
23.	A Family Affair	Also as: Picture of Guilt	1969
24.	Death at the Chase		1970
25.	An Awkward Lie		1971
26.	The Open House		1972
27.	Appleby's Answer		1973
28.	Appleby's Other Story		1974
29.	The Appleby File		1975

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| 30. The Gay Phoenix | 1976 |
| 31. The Ampersand Papers | 1978 |
| 32. Shieks and Adders | 1982 |
| 33. Appleby and Honeybath | 1983 |
| 34. Carson's Conspiracy | 1984 |
| 35. Appleby and the Ospreys | 1986 |

Honeybath Titles in order of first publication

These titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

- | | |
|------------------------------|------|
| 1. The Mysterious Commission | 1974 |
| 2. Honeybath's Haven | 1977 |
| 3. Lord Mullion's Secret | 1981 |
| 4. Appleby and Honeybath | 1983 |

Synopses (Both Series & 'Stand-alone' Titles)

Published by House of Stratus



The Ampersand Papers

While Appleby is strolling along a Cornish beach, he narrowly escapes being struck by a body falling down a cliff. The body is that of Dr Sutch, an archivist, and he has fallen from the North Tower of Treskinnick Castle, home of Lord Ampersand. Two possible motivations present themselves to Appleby – the Ampersand gold, treasure from an Armada galleon; and the Ampersand papers, valuable family documents that have associations with Wordsworth and Shelley.



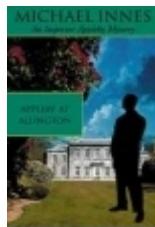
Appleby and Honeybath

Every English mansion has a locked room, and Grinton Hall is no exception – the library has hidden doors and passages...and a corpse. But when the corpse goes missing, Sir John Appleby and Charles Honeybath have an even more perplexing case on their hands – just how did it disappear when the doors and windows were securely locked? A bevy of helpful houseguests offer endless assistance, but the two detectives suspect that they are concealing vital information. Could the treasures on the library shelves be so valuable that someone would murder for them?



Appleby and the Ospreys

Clusters, a great country house, is troubled by bats, as Lord and Lady Osprey complain to their guests, who include first rate detective, Sir John Appleby. In the matter of bats, Appleby is indifferent, but he is soon faced with a real challenge – the murder of Lord Osprey, stabbed with an ornate dagger in the library.



Appleby at Allington

Sir John Appleby dines one evening at Allington Park, the Georgian home of his acquaintance Owain Allington, who is new to the area. His curiosity is aroused when Allington mentions his nephew and heir to the estate, Martin Allington, whose name Appleby recognises. The evening comes to an end but just as Appleby is leaving, they find a dead man – electrocuted in the son et lumière box which had been installed in the grounds.



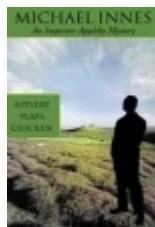
The Appleby File

There are fifteen stories in this compelling collection, including: Poltergeist – when Appleby's wife tells him that her aunt is experiencing trouble with a Poltergeist, he is amused but dismissive, until he discovers that several priceless artefacts have been smashed as a result; A Question of Confidence – when Bobby Appleby's friend, Brian Button, is caught up in a scandalous murder in Oxford, Bobby's famous detective father is their first port of call; The Ascham – an abandoned car on a narrow lane intrigues Appleby and his wife, but even more intriguing is the medieval castle they stumble upon.



Appleby on Ararat

Inspector Appleby is stranded on a very strange island, with a rather odd bunch of people – too many men, too few women (and one of them too attractive) cause a deal of trouble. But that is nothing compared to later developments, including the body afloat in the water, and the attack by local inhabitants.



Appleby Plays Chicken

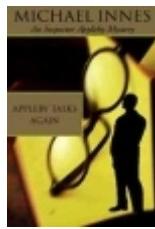
David was hiking across Dartmoor, pleased to have escaped the oppressively juvenile and sometimes perilous behaviour of his fellow undergraduates. As far as he could tell, he was the only human being for miles – but it turns out that he was the only living human being for miles. At least, that is what he presumed when he found a dead man on top of the tor.



Appleby Talking

Arbuthnot is paying for a rash decision – he recently married a beautiful but slightly amoral girl whose crazy antics caught his rather cynical professional interest. His wife has taken a lover, Rupert Slade, and Arbuthnot wants nothing more than to see him dead – but the last thing he expected was that he'd walk into his living room and find just that!

Inspector Appleby shares the details of this and many other fascinating crimes in this un-missable collection.



Appleby Talks Again

Ralph Dangerfield, an Edwardian playwright who belonged to the smartest young set of his day, kept a scandalous diary recording the intimate details of his own life and those of his friends. After his death, it was believed that his mother had burnt the incriminating evidence, but fifty years later, a famous collector of literary curiosities claims to have the diary in his possession and threatens to blackmail fashionable London with belated secrets about people now in respectable old age. Sir John Appleby reveals how he uncovered this unscrupulous crime and talks about his key role in seventeen more intriguing cases.



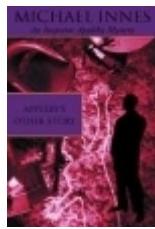
Appleby's Answer

Author of detective novels, Priscilla Pringle, is pleased to find that she is sharing a railway compartment with a gentleman who happens to be reading one of her books – *Murder in the Cathedral*. He is military officer, Captain Bulkington, who recognises Miss Pringle and offers her £500 to collaborate on a detective novel. To everyone's surprise, Miss Pringle is rather taken with Captain Bulkington – is she out of her depth?



Appleby's End

Appleby's End was the name of the station where Detective Inspector John Appleby got off the train from Scotland Yard. But that was not the only coincidence. Everything that happened from then on related back to stories by Ranulph Raven, Victorian novelist – animals were replaced by marble effigies, someone received a tombstone telling him when he would die, and a servant was found buried up to his neck in snow, dead. Why did Ranulph Raven's mysterious descendants make such a point of inviting Appleby to spend the night at their house?



Appleby's Other Story

During a walk to Elvedon House, palatial home of the Tythertons, Sir John Appleby and Chief Constable Colonel Pride are stunned to find a police van and two cars parked outside. Wealthy Maurice Tytherton has been found shot dead, and Appleby is faced with a number of suspects – Alice Tytherton, flirtatious, younger wife of the deceased; Egon Raffaello, disreputable art dealer; and the prodigal son, Mark Tytherton, who has just returned from Argentina. Could the death be linked to the robbery of some paintings several years ago?



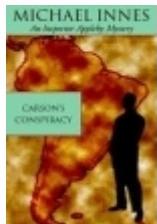
An Awkward Lie

Sir John Appleby's son, Bobby, assumes his father's detective role in this baffling crime. When Bobby finds a dead man, in a bunker on a golf course, he notices something rather strange – the first finger of the man's right hand is missing. A young girl approaches the scene and offers to watch the body while Bobby goes for help, but when he returns with the police in tow, the body and the girl are missing.



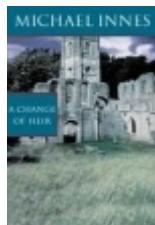
The Bloody Wood

An assorted party of guests have gathered at Charne, home of Charles Martineau and his ailing wife, Grace, including Sir John Appleby and his wife, Judith. Appleby's suspicions are soon aroused with the odd behaviour of Charles, and the curious last request of Grace – who desires that upon her death, Charles marries her favourite niece, Martine. When Charles and Grace die on the same day, foul play is suspected.



Carson's Conspiracy

Businessman Carl Carson decides to make a dash for South America to escape the economic slump, leaving his home and his barmy wife. But he has a problem – if his company were seen to be drawing in its horns, it wouldn't last a week. His solution is his wife's favourite delusion – an imaginary son, named Robin. Carson plans to stage a fictitious kidnapping – after all, what could be more natural than a father liquidating his assets to pay the ransom demand? Unfortunately, Carson has a rather astute neighbour – Sir John Appleby, ex-Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police.



A Change of Heir

George Gadberry, 'resting actor', packs his bags and heads for obscurity when the Tax Inspector beckons. Then he receives a mysterious invitation and a proposition that could lead to enormous riches. Wealthy imbiber, Nicholas Comberford, wants George to impersonate him in order to secure a place in the will of fabulously affluent Great-Aunt Prudence, who lives in a Cistercian monastery and won't allow a single drop of liquor in the place. Gadberry's luck seems to have changed – but at what cost?



Christmas at Candleshoe

When an American multi-millionaire is keen to buy an Elizabethan manor, she comes up against fierce opposition from a young boy, Jay, and his band of bowmen, who are prepared to defend the manor and its nonagerian owner against all comers. It seems likely that that behind a monumental, seventeenth-century carving, by the hand of Gerard Christmas, lies a hoard of treasure.



A Connoisseur's Case

When John Appleby's wife, Judith, sets eyes on Scroop House, she insists that they introduce themselves to the owners – a suggestion that makes her sometimes reserved husband turn very pale. When Judith hears the village gossip about the grand house, she is even more intrigued; but when a former employee is found dead in the lock of the disused canal, and the immense wealth of Scroop's contents is revealed, Appleby has a gripping investigation on his hands.



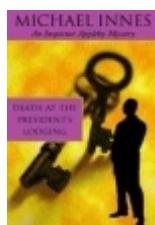
The Daffodil Affair

Inspector Appleby's aunt is most distressed when her horse, Daffodil – a somewhat half-witted animal with exceptional numerical skills – goes missing from her stable I Harrogate. Meanwhile, Hudspith is hot on the trail of Lucy Rideout, an enigmatic young girl has been whisked away to an unknown isle by a mysterious gentleman. And when a house in Bloomsbury, supposedly haunted, also goes missing, the baffled policemen search for a connection. As Appleby and Hudspith trace Daffodil and Lucy, the fragments begin to come together and an extravagant project is uncovered, leading them to South American jungle.



Death at the Chase

When master sleuth, Appleby, leaps over a stile during a country stroll, he is apprehended by an irate Martyn Ashmore, owner of the land on which Appleby has unwittingly trespassed. But when the misunderstanding is cleared up, eccentric, aged Ashmore reveals that he is in fear for his life – once every year, someone attempts to murder him. Is it the French Resistance, or a younger Ashmore on the make? When Martyn dies, Appleby sets out to find who exactly is responsible.



Death At The President's Lodging

Inspector Appleby is called to St Anthony's College, where the President has been murdered in his Lodging. Scandal abounds when it becomes clear that the only people with any motive to murder him are the only people who had the opportunity – because the President's Lodging opens off Orchard Ground, which is locked at night, and only the Fellows of the College have keys...



A Family Affair

Over a period of twenty years, a series of highly elaborate art hoaxes have been perpetrated at carefully time intervals, and in each case, the victim has a very good reason for keeping quiet. Inspector Appleby's interest is kindled by an amusing dinner-party anecdote – when he enlists the help of his wife and son, the ensuing investigation is truly a family affair. The scenes shift swiftly between glorious stately homes and the not-so-glorious art gallery of the irrepressibly dubious Hildebert Braunkopf.



From London Far

As Meredith, an academic, stands in a Bloomsbury tobacconist waiting for his two ounces of tobacco, he murmurs a verse of 'London, a Poem' and is astounded when a trap door opens into the London Catacombs, bringing him face to face with the Horton Venus, by Titian. From then on he is trapped in a maze of the illicit art trade, in the company of the redoubtable Jane Halliwell.



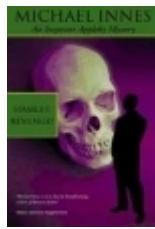
The Gay Phoenix

When tycoon, Charles Povey, is killed in a bizarre boating accident, his corrupt, look-alike brother, Arthur, adopts his identity and his financial empire. But the charade becomes complicated when one of Charles's many mistresses sees through the guise and blackmails Arthur. Enter retired detective, Sir John Appleby...



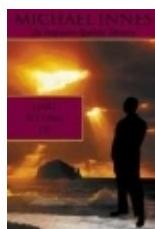
Going it Alone

Gilbert Averell avoids some of the rigours of taxation by living for part of each year in France – but he is unhappy about the number of weeks he spends away from his native country. So when his look-alike friend, Georges, suggests that they swap passports for a short spell, Gilbert seizes the opportunity. However, a number of incidents, involving Gilbert's sister and nephew, begin to suggest that Georges's offer was not made out of simple friendship.



Hamlet, Revenge!

At Seamnum Court, seat of the Duke of Horton, The Lord Chancellor of England is murdered at the climax of a private presentation of Hamlet, in which he plays Polonius. Inspector Appleby pursues some of the most famous names in the country, unearthing dreadful suspicion.



Hare Sitting Up

When a germ-warfare expert goes missing, his twin brother impersonates him as a cover-up, but for how long can this last? Inspector Appleby is sent on a series of wild goose chases, which take him to a preparatory school, to the estate of an eccentric earl, and to a remote Atlantic rock, before a truly shocking climax.



Honeybath's Haven

When portrait-painter and occasional detective, Charles Honeybath, pays a visit to his old friend Edwin Lightfoot, there are a few surprises in store. Edwin's irksome wife is packing her bags, while Edwin is indulging in an eccentric game of pretence – acting the part of a long-dead petty criminal named Flannel Foot. Days later, when Edwin disappears, Honeybath finds himself with a mystery to solve and some decisions to make about his life – will he be lured by his intended haven?



The Journeying Boy

Humphrey Paxton, the son of one of Britain's leading atomic boffins, has taken to carrying a shotgun to 'shoot plotters and blackmailers and spies'. His new tutor, the plodding Mr Thewless, suggests that Humphrey might be overdoing it somewhat. But when a man is found shot dead at a cinema, Mr Thewless is plunged into a nightmare world of lies, kidnapping and murder – and grave matters of national security.



Lament for a Maker

When mad recluse, Ranald Guthrie, the laird of Erchany, falls from the ramparts of his castle on a wild winter night, Appleby discovers the doom that shrouded his life, and the grim legends of the bleak and nameless hamlets, in a tale that emanates sheer terror and suspense.



The Long Farewell

Lewis Packford, the great Shakespearean scholar, was thought to have discovered a book annotated by the Bard – but there is no trace of this valuable object when Packford apparently commits suicide. Sir John Appleby finds a mixed bag of suspects at the dead man's house, who might all have a good motive for murder. The scholars and bibliophiles who were present might have been tempted by the precious document in Packford's possession. And Appleby discovers that Packford had two secret marriages, and that both of these women were at the house at the time of his death.



Lord Mullion's Secret

At Mullion Castle, sumptuous stately home, we meet the Earl and his family, who include his delightful daughters, Patty and Boosie, and dotty Great-aunt Camilla.

Old school chum, Charles Honeybath, who has been commissioned to paint a portrait of the Earl's wife, finds himself at the helm of a complex investigation involving ancestral works of art and a young under gardener, Swithin, who seems to possess the family features somewhat strikingly ...



The Man From The Sea

When a man swims to shore from a freighter off the Scottish coast, he interrupts a midnight rendezvous between Richard Cranston and Lady Blair. Richard sees an obscure opportunity to regain his honour with the Blair family after he hears the swimmer's incredible tale of espionage, treason and looming death. But this mysterious man is not all he seems, and Richard is propelled into life threatening danger.



Money From Holme

Sebastian Holme was a painter who, as the exhibition catalogue recorded, had met a tragic death during a foreign revolution. Art dealer, Braunkopf, has made a small fortune from the exhibition. Unfortunately, Holme turns up at the private view in this fascinating mystery of the art world in which Mervyn Cheel, distinguished critic and pointillist painter, lands in very hot water.



The Mysterious Commission

Portrait painter, Charles Honeybath, is intrigued when he is visited by a mysterious Mr Peach and is commissioned to paint an anonymous, aristocratic sitter, known only as 'Mr X', whom relatives claim is insane. Under cover of night, Honeybath is taken to the house and asked to stay while he completes his work; but when he returns to his studio, he discovers that the bank next door has been robbed and that he is under suspicion!



The New Sonia Wayward

Colonel Ffolliot Petticate's predicament begins when his novelist wife, Sonia, drowns during a sailing trip in the English Channel. A dramatic cover-up ensues in a tale full of humour, irony and devastating suspense.



A Night of Errors

A gruelling night of shrouded motives and confused identities develops when the last of the Dromios is found murdered, with both of his hands burnt off. He was one of triplets, whose brothers had died in a fire forty years previously. Inspector Appleby wrenches the facts from a melodrama in which the final solution is written in fire.



Old Hall, New Hall

The forbears of Sir John Jory, of New Hall, would seem to have committed several foul acts, including tomb-robbing and murder. Old Hall, the family's former residence, is now a University. Biographer Colin Clout, engaged to write an account of one of Jory's ancestors, gets caught up in a frenzied treasure hunt as rival interests and rival claimants probe the past and naked greed comes to the fore.



The Open House

When Inspector Appleby's car breaks down on a deserted road one dark night, he happens upon an imposing mansion, whose windows are all illuminated. His sense of curiosity gets the better of him when he discovers that the front door is wide open, and he gets a funny feeling of being watched as he wanders round this splendid house, looking for signs of life. When he finds an elaborate feast laid out, he wonders who is expected...



Operation Pax

A two-bit con-man is thrown in at the deep end as a desperate hunt takes place in Oxford, in this gripping tale whose thrilling climax takes place in the vaults of the Bodleian.



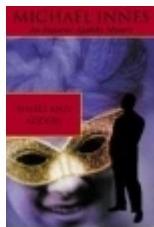
A Private View

Sir John and Lady Appleby attend a memorial exhibition of the oils, gouaches, collages and trouvailles of artist Gavin Limbert, who was recently found shot, under very suspicious circumstances. As Assistant Commissioner of Police, Sir John is already interested, but he becomes even more intrigued when Limbert's last masterpiece is stolen from the gallery under his very eyes.



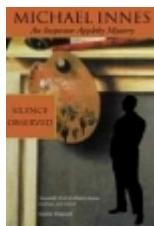
The Secret Vanguard

Successful minor poet, Philip Ploss, lives a peaceful existence in ideal surroundings, until his life is upset when he hears verses erroneously quoted as his own. Soon afterwards, he is found dead in the library with a copy of Dante's *Purgatory* open before him.



Sheiks and Adders

When half of the guests at a charity masquerade fête at Drool Court turn up dressed as sheiks, it must be more than pure coincidence. One of them is the real thing, however, and Sir John Appleby, master detective, discovers that he is in grave danger. When one of the pseudo-sheiks is murdered, Appleby finds himself in the midst of an international political crisis.



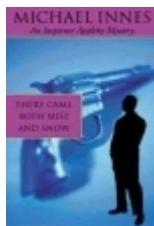
Silence Observed

Respected Fine Art experts are deceived in one of the most intriguing murder cases Inspector Appleby has ever faced, beginning with Gribble, a collector of forgeries whose latest acquisition is found to be a forged forgery! In the words of Appleby himself: 'Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. Just a little mad, for a start. Inclined, say, to unreasonable jokes in the course of business. But later – well, very mad indeed.'



Stop Press

Famous writer, Richard Eliot, has written numerous detective novels, featuring 'The Spider', a daring, clever criminal in earlier books, and an equally canny private investigator in later ones. But when he comes to life – first to burgle an odd neighbour, then to harass the Eliot family, and finally to attend his own 'birthday party' – Inspector John Appleby is sent to investigate.



There Came Both Mist and Snow

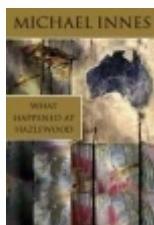
Stunning Belrive Priory, consisting of a mansion, park and medieval ruins, is surrounded by the noise and neon signs of its gaudy neighbours – a cotton-mill, a brewey and a main road.

Nevertheless, Arthur Ferryman is pleased to return for a family Christmas, but is shocked to discover that his cousins have taken up a new pastime – pistol-shooting. Inspector Appleby arrives on the scene when one of Ferryman's cousins is found shot dead in the study, in a mystery built on family antagonisms.



The Weight of the Evidence

Meteorites fall from the sky but seldom onto the heads of science dons in redbrick universities; yet this is what happens to Professor Pluckrose of Nestfield University. Inspector Appleby soon discovers that the meteorite was not fresh and that the professor's deckchair had been placed underneath a large, accessible tower – he already knew something of academic jealousies but he was to find out a great deal more.



What Happened at Hazlewood

The Simney family, of Hazlewood Hall, have a dubious history. Sir George Simney, who was travelling in Australia before the baronetcy fell to him, sleeps with a shotgun by his side. When he is found dead in the library, the Reverend Adrian Deamer will not rest until he has discovered who is responsible. This is an absorbing tale narrated by Simney's widow, Nicolette, and by young Harold, who has just joined the C.I.D.



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